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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

NICK CARTER'S SATANIC ENEMY

Nick Carter was lifted and flung into the water

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NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

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Nick Carter's Satanic Enemy

OR,

THE CASE OF THE EASY MARK.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE PLIGHT OF AN EASY MARK.

Nick Carter parted with Chick at the door.

"I'll try to get back to-night," he said, "but don't be alarmed if I fail to show up before to-morrow morning. He says the case is very important, and the story of his troubles may take up half the night. And it is a long trip, anyhow."

Leaving his residence, the great detective found a cab and was driven to the ferry to Astoria. It was after dark and the appointment had been set for eight o'clock.

It was half-past seven when Nick left the ferry-boat on the Long Island side. Time was at his disposal, and he needed the physical exercise, so he concluded to walk to the residence of Gerald Laken, the man who had solicited his services.

Along one broad Astoria avenue to another the detective went, seeing few people and finding in the stillness perfect opportunity for calm reflection.

Laken, a well-known capitalist, a man who lived a retired life; who had never engaged in any business, having inherited his fortune; who lived an ideal happy life, so every one supposed, had phoned Nick that he was in grave trouble and desired the services of a detective. Would Nick take the case? It was a very important one, and the fear that he would be shadowed and his business suspected, made him averse to calling at Nick's residence in New York. Therefore, he earnestly requested the detective to come to Astoria and come after dark.

"Laken has no children," mused Nick, as he walked along the tree-bordered walk, "and his wife is one of the nicest women in the country. The last time I saw them they did not seem to have a care in the world. What can the trouble be, I wonder?"

He was within a few rods of the stone arch in which was set the gate opening into the spacious grounds of the Laken residence, when from a large tree, two masked men sprang upon him. One was armed with a sandbag, and the murderous weapon grazed Nick's head as he dodged and grappled with the wielder.

The fight was an unequal one. The great detective could easily have managed both men if he had not been surprised and compelled to give instant attention to the one who used the sandbag. He was choking the assassin, whose efforts to make a successful resistance had ceased, when the other villain, who had been watching for his chance, dealt Nick several vicious blows with the butt end of a revolver. The blows would have paralyzed the energies of an ordinary man, but Nick, with senses reeling, arose to his knees and, grasping the second assailant about the legs, threw him to the ground.

The fellow was stockily built and fought desperately.

Nick hung on like a bulldog, and was trying to pinion the man's arms when a rush of feet was heard behind the combatants.

The masked villain made one desperate effort to get away, and because the detective's strength was waning, succeeded in doing so, but he left behind him in the clutch of Nick Carter the long overcoat he had been wearing.

Two citizens bent over the detective, who lay gasping on the walk with the overcoat in his hands.

"What has happened?" asked one of them.

"I—I was assaulted by two ruffians," was the answer given with an effort. "Where are they?"

"They have gone," was the reply. "They ran away when we came up. Do you reside near here? Give me your address and I will have a carriage come for you."

"I live in New York, but I would like to see Mr. Gerald Laken."

"That is my name," was the surprised response. "You must be——"

"Yes," interrupted Nick quickly. "I was on my way to your house when these two men sprang from behind a tree and attacked me."

Gerald Laken said something to his companion and presently the other walked away.

Nick was assisted to his feet and supported to the gate.

An electric bell summoned a gardener, and in a short time millionaire and detective were in the former's den.

Nick had refused to permit Laken to send for a doctor, alleging that his hurts were not serious. He had sustained several ugly-looking scalp wounds, but the skull was uninjured. After the blood had been washed away and a soothing lotion applied, the detective announced himself as feeling well enough to attend to business.

But Laken would not consent to going into the case that night.

"You must sleep," he said, "and get your nerves in good shape before listening to my story. I can wait until to-morrow."

In the morning Nick, who was sore but not feverish, sent a long message to Chick and then had breakfast.

Laken was astonished at the detective's condition. "I expected to find you tossing in fever," he said. "Your recuperative powers are certainly wonderful."

"I am in good health," was the reply, "and I always take proper care of myself. I may not be able to attend any aristocratic social function to-night, but I will be ready to do other things of a practical nature."

In the afternoon Nick, with clear head, bright eyes, and fairly comfortable feeling, lighted a cigar and prepared to hear what Laken had to say.

The millionaire puffed nervously at his weed and seemed disinclined to begin. At last he drew a deep breath and said: "You are a physiognomist. What would you put me up to be?"

Nick looked at the full, handsome countenance with the large kindly eyes and the slightly retreating chin, noted other characteristics, and replied: "I should say that you were a man who could easily be imposed upon; that you are of a benevolent temperament and are inclined to err on the side of charity."

Laken evidenced no surprise and no discomfiture. He smiled.

"You've struck it fairly well, Mr. Carter, but you haven't put the case strong enough. I *am* easily imposed upon. In a word, I am the champion Easy Mark."

It was now Nick's turn to smile. But the smile did not breathe offense. It was sympathetic.

"I have tried in vain to cure myself of the penchant of snapping up every bait offered by mendacious people, but I haven't succeeded in changing my nature. I have, however, done the next best thing. I have put it out of my power to yield to further temptation to make a fool of myself. But I will speak of that anon.

"My fortune came to me from the estate of my deceased father. He died when I was twenty years old, and for five years I was in the hands of trustees, and therefore safe from dangerous imposition. At twenty-six I married, and my wife has been all the world to me. She is now in Florida, and will not return for a month.

"I have been married ten years, and for nine of those years I lived a serenely happy life. I spent money freely, and though I was the target for an army of chronic beggars, I never complained. I thought it better to give to all and run the chance of relieving the necessity of one deserving applicant than to refuse all and perhaps become indirectly the cause of additional human suffering. But during the past year a new and vicious element has entered into my experiences. I have been the victim of a brace of criminals, and though I have so arranged my affairs that no further contributions can be made, yet their importunities have become so pronounced that my life is in danger.

"I met one of these criminals while crossing on the boat from New York. He did not look like a bad one. Not over twenty-five, slight, graceful, and well dressed, he seemed to reflect in his dark, appealing eyes and his thin, intellectual face the qualities of refinement, honesty, and pride."

"He was sitting in a corner with his hands to his face when you noticed him, was he not?" Nick quietly asked.

"He was, but how did you guess that?" regarding the detective in amazement.

Nick answered gravely: "I know the kind. I have seen them operate."

"The play is a good one," the millionaire went on slowly, "and it will always win in the case of a subject built as I am. The young man was in trouble, I thought, and I approached and spoke to him sympathetically. I asked if I could be of any assistance. The young man stared at me, and at first made no reply. But thinking better of it, he said after a long pause: 'I thank you, sir, for your commiseration, but you can do nothing for me. My case is too grave.'

"This statement aroused my curiosity. I gently insisted on knowing what his trouble was. I told him I was in a position, I thought, to be of help.

"He looked at me curiously as I said this, and after

gulping down a sob, burst out: 'I am the most miserable person alive. My mother is in Liverpool; she has sent for me, and I cannot go to her. I am penniless.'

"I smiled benevolently, and the soothing words I spoke sent the light of hope into the young man's eyes. I told him that his case was not one to warrant despair, and wound up by offering to advance the money required for the trip and expenses."

Nick Carter frowned. "You *were* an easy mark," he said.

"I admit it. I swallowed the bait, hook and all. I gave that accomplished actor five hundred dollars—he said his mother was poor—and left him, as I supposed, the most grateful young man in New York.

"A few days after this experience, I was again crossing the ferry. The boat was just pushing off when a tall, thin, ungainly man clutched me by the arm and excitedly stated that his life was in danger, and asked me to save him. He spoke in a peculiar dialect, and looking at his face, I at once made up my mind that he was a Russian Jew."

The great detective pricked up his ears.

"I wanted an explanation, and he tremblingly gave it. He had just left on the wharf a man who had threatened to kill him. 'He yoost missed der poat,' he said, 'und I mate it. He vill vait undil der nexd poat und den he vill coom afder me. Vere shall I hite?' He cracked his knuckles in a fever of anxiety, and as I said nothing in reply, he continued: 'Dat mans vos my rivals in der olt gountry. De vomans marryit me und Wolf Reifenberg svore he vould haf mine life for cudding him out. I vos gome guick avay from Russia, but Reifenberg he gome too. Vell,' with a pitiful shrug of the shoulders, 'vot you dink? I peen here in Ni Yorruk von month ven Reifenstein gill mine vife and sdab me. I vos yoost gome out of dat horsepiddle.'

"He paused, saw that the boat was nearing the slip on this side, and went on hurriedly: 'He see me on der Powery a vile ago und he vollered me dinkin' dat I dell some bolismans. Bud I ton't do dat. I peen avraid maype he haf confederates who vould gill me if I exposes him. I runs vor de verry. Dere vos a poat going out und I gomes aboard. Safe me, misder mans,' he pleaded, 'und I vill pless you to der longest hour of mine life.'

"Well, the upshot was that I took that scheming wretch to my home, kept him over night, and in the morning conveyed him in my motor car to Doucaster station beyond Flushing and arranged for a boat at Little Neck Bay to take him to New Rochelle, where he could board a train for Massachusetts. On leaving him I pressed two hundred dollars into his hand."

"And that was the last you ever saw of him, I suppose?" interrogated Nick with a quiet smile.

Laken replied with a snap: "Not by a jugfull. He came to my house a week afterward, said that he had been followed, and that his only hope of eluding his enemy was to cross the ocean. He had friends in London who would look out for him. Having said this, he bemoaned his pecuniary condition. If he had the money he would go into the tailoring business, London being a good place for that. I took the hint and responded. I believed his story, and it was with a sense of gratification that I parted with one thousand dollars and saw that old fraud leave the house slobbering words of undying appreciation of my kindness."

"Your next call was from the young man, was it not?"

"Yes. A month after the parting with the Russian Jew, the young fellow accosted me at the ferry landing as I was on my way to New York. He looked well and happy. 'I did not know where you lived,' he said, 'or I would have called and thanked you again for what you have done for me. My mother has recovered her health and is now here with me in America. We are domiciled in New York, and she will be pleased to have you call and see her. She, too, wants to thank you.'

"I had no desire to listen to words of commendation, words punctured with tears, and I would have found some way to put the young man off had he not strongly insisted upon my going to his lodgings after I had transacted my business.

"We crossed the river together, and I made an appointment to meet him two hours later at the post office. He said his lodgings were on Fulton Street a few blocks from Broadway. He was on time, and we went to the lodgings. The building was respectable in exterior, but was shabby, interiorly. In a room without carpet and with the poorest of furniture, I met the man's mother. She did not impress me favorably, though I could give no satisfactory reason for my dislike. She was so profuse in her thanks that I was obliged to cut her short."

"Describe the woman," put in Nick quickly.

"She was over fifty, I should say, hard-featured, and had snaky eyes. Her voice was harsh, and her teeth—I don't think she ever used a brush."

"Did it occur to you, then or afterward, that she might be related to the Russian Jew?"

Gerald Laken started. A dim idea of the truth crept into his brain. "By George, now that you have mentioned it, I do recall that her voice, though it had no trace of foreign accent, was curiously like that of the Hebrew. Do you think they were brother and sister?"

"No. I think they were one and the same person."

Laken drew a sharp breath. He winked his eyes rapidly. "I believe you are right," he said, "but I would never have guessed it."

"She is a good actress," said Nick, "but she can't hold a candle to the other one." There was a question in the millionaire's eyes, but instead of answering it, the detective added quickly: "I have something to remark, but I will not say it until you have finished your story."

Laken then continued: "I assumed my rôle of Easy Mark while I was in the room. When the young man, whose name, by the way, is Harry Gooch, lacked

words, the mother furnished them. Between them they landed me.

"The son—I'll call him so, for you have not yet told me anything to the contrary—said that he was anxious to do something to earn a living for himself and his mother. He informed me that he was an expert watchmaker, and that his ambition was to open a jewelry store. He was sure to succeed, for New York was growing at a wonderful rate and the business was a paying one. I listened and when he proposed that I should go his security for stock and take a bill of sale, I was not startled. Before I could reply, the mother said reprovingly: 'Harry, you don't know what you are talking about. Mr. Laken—I had given them my name—cannot take a bill of sale of another man's property. If he goes security he becomes responsible for the stock in case of fire or destruction by other means. The stock remains the property of the manufacturer until it has been paid for.'

"Harry's jaw fell. 'I thought I could secure Mr. Laken,' he said despondingly. 'Now I see that I will have to give up the idea of becoming a merchant.'

"'Mr. Laken might buy the stock for you,' suggested the mother, with an appealing look at me, 'and either take a bill of sale or allow it to remain in his name until you have paid for it.'

"We talked a while longer, and I promised to think over the matter and give them my decision the next day. At the time I had really made up my mind to help Harry to become a merchant, but I thought it best to assume the air of a business man even if I were far from being one.

"Before going to the Goochs' lodging house next day, I made inquiries and found I could get a small stock, sufficient for starting in business, for ten thousand dollars. I resolved to make the purchase and keep the property in my name. In announcing my decision to Harry, I said that I would not demand any interest on the money I had paid out. He could use the stock and pay for it in installments at his own convenience."

"That was not business-like," remarked Nick.

"I know it, and I know, also, that the whole transaction was unbusiness-like. But I had confidence in the young man, and I wanted him to succeed. A storeroom near Broadway was found and the goods were installed. The store was kept open for a week and was then closed. I passed there one day and noticed that there was nothing on display in the small show window. I tried the door and found it locked. Then I looked in and saw emptiness. The stock had been removed.

"Even then I did not grasp the truth. I thought that young Gooch had found a better location, but after I had made inquiries, I learned that the stock had been taken in two large trunks to the Coertlandt Street ferry.

"I waited several days before making other inquiries. They were fruitless, and while I was trying to decide whether or not I had been gulled, my wife wrote me a letter from Saint Augustine. It was short and concluded with these words: 'Good-by for a little while. I know you need me, for one of your easy nature should not be left alone.'"

Laken sighed. Nick swallowed a laugh and said seriously: "That experience ought to have soured you on appealing strangers."

"But it didn't. A short time after the Gooch episode, the old Jew showed up again. He was half crazy with grief. At least he appeared to be. He had not sailed for England. In Boston, where he intended to take ship, he was robbed of all his money. He had taken lodging for the night in an obscure quarter, and for safety had placed the money under his pillow. In the morning he looked for it. It was not there."

"And you staked him again, did you?"

"Yes, and two hours afterward, as I was walking down Broadway, I saw him in earnest conversation with Harry Gooch."

CHAPTER II.

NICK CARTER'S PERILOUS MISSION.

"The Jew and the young man were standing in front of a branch railway office opposite the post office. They saw me and evidenced not surprise but pleasure. As I strode toward them with a black face, Harry Gooch stepped forward and held out his hand.

"Too indignant to respond to this act of friendliness, I said sternly: 'You deceived me; you are a scoundrel!'

"He neither grew pale nor exhibited anger. No, the rascal smiled in my face. 'You are mistaken, Mr. Laken,' he replied with cold dignity, 'I have not deceived you.'

"'Where, then, is the jewelry I bought for you, and why are you here with that Russian?' My indignation was not cooling, for I had now begun to suspect that the Jew was a fraud as well as Harry Gooch. The fact of finding together two persons who had bled me for thousands of dollars was not calculated to put me in the best of humor. You would have concluded that they were in collusion, and I was beginning to think so when the young man said earnestly and with tears in his eyes—I saw them—that the jewelry was safe and that he could explain matters to my entire satisfaction.

"He proposed an adjournment to the reading room of the Astor House, and I followed him to the place. The Jew went along with us. 'He is a friend of mine,' explained young Gooch. 'I will tell you about him, presently.'

"I had nothing to say. I was anxious to hear his story, and I made up my mind that I would not be hoodwinked. He might be an honest man, and I might have wronged him in my thoughts. I would wait and judge him by what he had to say."

"You were weakening at the time, and you did not know it," remarked Nick. "I think I can see your finish. You listened and were lost."

Laken inclined his head. With a shamefaced expression, he went on: "Yes, I listened to a tale told with such evident frankness and sincerity that I swallowed it. He said that his mother was dead. She had contracted pneumonia, and because he could not leave her bedside and had no one to whom he could intrust his business, he had been compelled to remove his stock and give up his store. The jewelry, he said, was stored in Jersey City in the vaults of the principal bank.

"He showed me the receipt given for the storage of two trunks and then continued: 'I selected Jersey City because I intend to reopen in that place. I have heard of a location formerly occupied by a jeweler who amassed a fortune and then went to Europe to reside.'

"Proceeding, he said that he stayed with his mother until death came, and that he had neither written nor called on me because he had been informed that I had gone to Florida. As my wife had gone there, I saw how a report might have been circulated that I had also departed.

"'Now,' said young Gooch, 'I am more than glad to have met you, for I can at once convince you that the stock is safe. My friend, Mr. Weiberstein,' indicating the Jew, 'has consented to enter my employ. I really need an assistant, and he is one of the best watchmakers in the State.'

"This was news to me, for the Jew had led me to suppose that he was a tailor. And more important still, I had given the Jew money for passage to England and for opening there in the tailoring business. Another explanation was demanded.

"I did not have to wait long for it. Weiberstein now began to talk in an humbly apologetic manner. He hoped I would excuse him, but after leaving me he had come upon Mr. Gooch, whom he had known ever since his arrival in New York. Mr. Gooch had met him soon after the arrival in port of the German steamship, and had assisted him in finding a lodging on the East Side. For weeks they had been close friends, and their intimacy had terminated only when Reifenberg appeared to murder Mrs. Weiberstein and send the narrator to the hospital.

"'Are you a watchmaker?' I asked. 'You never told me that.'

"'I vos peen a goot many dings,' he replied. 'Ven I vound dot mine frent, Harry, vos a vatchmager, I tolet him dot I vos von, doo. Derevore ven I meeds him avile ago und dells him I vos on my vay to puy a digid vor Liverpool, he vanted to know vy dot vos. After I haf told him he say, vy ton'd I coom mit him und pe a cheweler. I dinks so, doo, Misder Lagens, und I vos delling him I must see you apoud dot ven you coom along der sdreed. I hobe you tond mage objections, pecause it is petter dot I sday here ven Reifenberg haf gone to Chermany.'

"'He has gone, has he?' I said.

"'A frent of mine told me dot he sailed dwo days ago. He peen thinging dot I go dere doo.'"

Gerald Laken, who had been looking Nick Carter in the face as he talked, now lowered his head. "Those two rascals," he went on, "kept me in the Astor reading room for an hour. Each helped the hand of the other in the talk that was meant to put me in proper condition for another rake-off. I again proved that I am an easy mark. I went over to Jersey City, but I did not get sight of the trunks and the stock of jewelry. I expected to go to the bank, but young Gooch, on one pretext and another, kept putting off the trip until the bank had closed. Before we parted the young roscal said that the expenses of his mother's illness and funeral had taken all his money and left him several hundred dollars in debt. It would also take, he said, about three hundred dollars to put his store in Jersey City in shape for business. I understood him and wrote out a check for five hundred dollars.

"Up to this time I had not informed my wife of what I had done. On reaching home I was seized with the impulse to write to her. I did so and told her everything. Four days later I received an answer. It opened my eyes. With her clear-headedness she had discovered what I had failed to discover. Her letter concluded with this piece of advice: 'Gerald, you will lose every dollar you have unless you take drastic measures to protect yourself from imposition.'

"Next day I went to my lawyer and laid the case before him. He first laughed, then grew grave. 'Laken,' said he, 'you have got to do two things. You have got to recover that stock of jewelry and you have got to deed all your property to your wife so as to put it out of your power to squander any more of it in your rôle of Easy Mark. You can trust your wife, can't you?'

"'Trust her? With my life. I gave an answer that might have caused another man of law to get red in the face with anger. This one smiled. Well, I signed the deeds which he prepared and then, armed with a writ of attachment and accompanied by an officer, went over to Jersey City. I expected to find Gooch in the store he told me he had rented, but the place was closed and vacant, and nothing had been done in the way of renovation and repair.

"We went to the bank, my lawyer had a long talk with the president, and at the end of it the banker led the way to the lower vaults. The trunks were there as young Gooch had said, and I confess that I began to breathe with more freedom when my eyes fell on them. They were opened and——"

"Found to contain brick, scraps of iron, and some such truck," broke in Nick, with an aggravating grin.

Laken nodded. "The jewelry was not there," he said, "and I have never recovered it."

"Well, what next?"

"The discovery that I had been gulled was made a week ago. Two days after my trip to Jersey City, I received a letter from Harry Gooch. It bore an out-of-town postmark—Stonington, Connecticut—and revealed him in his true colors. Here is the letter. Read it."

Laken took from his pocketbook an envelope, and withdrawing the enclosure, handed it to Nick, who with much interest read the following:

"My dear sweet specimen of an Easy Mark: The time has come for a showdown. You have been worked, but not to the limit. We are not done with you. It's a shame that one man should have more money than he knows what to do with. We have learned what you did in Jersey City, and that action put us wise to the fact that you are on. How did you get on? By your own little self, or did some level-headed friend put a flea in your massive ear? Listen, now, and take heed to what I say. We, my partner and myself, need a big wad of green paper. We desire to purchase a winter resort in Southern California. The sum we require is twenty thousand dollars. You will send this sum to me, for you are stuck on living. Do you clutch the hint? If you don't, here it is in flat-footed shape. If you do not, within five days, place in the crotch of the old elm at the foot of —— Avenue, Astoria, Long Island, twenty thousand dollars in national bank notes, your life will be taken. Don't imagine for a moment that you can queer us. Only one of us will go to that tree for the money. If this one should be caught, the other will surely do you. That's all. It's up to you to live to a green old age or quit living within a month."

"The five days will expire to-morrow," remarked the detective as he returned the letter.

"Yes. Now you know why I sent for you."

Nick accepted another cigar and began to smoke. Laken regarded him anxiously. At last the detective spoke: "You have been the victim of a clever pair of scoundrels," he said soberly, "and my life as well as yours is in danger."

"What? Do you think the attack on you last night was——"

"Was instigated by the persons you know as Harry Gooch and old Weiberstein, yes."

"Why should they desire your life?" asked the millionaire, in astonishment.

"Because I was on my way to your house to take up your case, and also because they have an old grudge against me, at least one of them has."

"Then you know them?"

"I think I do. Your description of the Jew and the woman who posed as the mother of Gooch convinces me that she—she's a she—is no other than Mrs. Smithers, a criminal who served a term in Boston for harboring a murderer, one Jocko Smithers, her brother. It was through my agency that Jocko Smithers was snuffed out of existence, and his sister, a most vindictive and unscrupulous woman, convicted and sent to jail."

"And the other, Harry Gooch, who is he?"

"He is also a she, and smarter than the majority of confidence operators. She—her name is Meg Alverson, and she has been on the stage—is about the slickest piece of feminine goods in the east. She was mixed up in the Smithers' affair, but at the last minute saved her bacon by squealing on Jocko Smithers, who had a crook in his brain and was an unreliable party to tie to. She wouldn't try to murder me if she were playing a lone hand, but she will not interfere with any deadly game that Mrs. Smithers hatches up. The old one would as soon kill a man as eat. She's a bad one, and we must cage her as soon as possible."

"How did these two devils discover that you were coming into the case?"

"They must have guessed it. Anyhow, they were on the lookout for the appearance of a detective, and, no doubt, the fiends who attacked me had been instructed to do murder if they found that the detective was Nicholas Carter, Esq."

"If you could learn who the assailants were, you might get a clue to the whereabouts of Meg Alverson and Mrs. Smithers," suggested Laken.

"That overcoat which one of the men left in my hands may help me out in tracing the assailants," replied Nick. "I am waiting for my assistant, Chick. When he comes we will begin work."

An hour after the foregoing talk Chick appeared. The message he had received from Nick had embraced a description—as far as the great detective was able to give one—of the two men who had tried to do murder on the walk near Laken's residence.

"I have not discovered anything," Chick said. "I examined the ground of the struggle, but found no clues. There are footprints, but they look so much like yours that they are worthless as pointers. Let me see the coat you copped."

The overcoat was produced and examined carefully by both Nick and Chick.

It was of navy blue in color and old and frayed. About the collar were a number of cuts evidently made with a pocket knife. Blood marks were also found on the collar and on one of the sleeves. The marks were old and were encrusted with dirt.

"That coat," said Nick, "belonged to a hobo, probably a 'yeggman,' the most vicious of the hobo class. The knife cuts tell the story of some drunken row. Rows among the tramps are common. Bad whisky or sour wine has caused more homicides than a few among the gentlemen of the road. Chick, here's your chance. Go among the hoboes on the outskirts of New York, Long Island, and Brooklyn and try to find out who owns that coat. Report to me here to-morrow afternoon."

Chick went away, and then Nick said to Laken: "I'll have to stay here until Chick comes back. By that time I will, I hope, be able myself to take the field."

After saying this, the detective went to the phone to have a talk with Patsy. He was surprised when Joseph, the valet, at Nick's New York residence, answered the call and gave him certain information.

"Patsy not there? Where is he?"

"Went out half an hour ago," answered Joseph. "Said you had called him up from a saloon on Pearl

Street, Big Andy's, and wanted him to come there at once."

"I never called him—he has been tricked."

Nick presented a wrathful face to the millionaire. "The enemy is at work again," he said. "My assistant, Patsy, has gone to a trap of some kind."

Laken was about to speak, but Nick had turned his back and was again busy at the phone.

Calling up the inspector's office he asked that a squad of policemen be sent to Big Andy's saloon, stating that Patsy had probably been trapped there.

"I must change my program," he announced as he once more faced Laken. "I must leave here at once. But I will return before night, if possible."

"Think you will be able to stand the trip across the water?"

"Oh, yes. My head is all right, and my strength has come back. I must look into this Big Andy matter. I am inclined to think there is more in it than appears on the surface. Patsy may not be in serious danger. I may be the one for whom the trap was prepared."

"I don't like the idea of staying here alone tonight," said Laken. "You may not finish your business in time to come back here and——"

"I understand," interrupted Nick. "You shall go to New York with me. When we reach the other side of the river you must take a cab and go to one of the downtown hotels and there register under an assumed name. In the morning you can return home."

This programme suited Laken. He mentioned the name of a hotel and Nick promised to call there some time during the evening if the time should be at his disposal.

They went together to New York, and Nick parted with the millionaire at the ferry.

The detective walked to the Ninety-second street station, ascended the stairs of the elevated, and was whirled toward his destination.

Three quarters of an hour after leaving the ferry he stood in front of Big Andy's saloon. There were but few people in the place and everything had an everyday appearance.

Nick entered and spoke to the proprietor, a new man in the locality. He was not Big Andrew. The big one had recently sold out, but the name of the resort had not been changed.

The man had the appearance of a fairly honest citizen, and the detective, without beating about the bush, asked him if the police had been there lately.

The proprietor gave Nick the benefit of an angry stare. "They wor' here, yes. An' did youse send 'em?"

Nick evaded the question by saying: "Some one told me that a friend of mine was here, and I was afraid the police might be after him."

"Was he a gun?"

"Who? My friend? No, he was an orange vendor, and he hadn't taken out a license."

"Oh, was that all. Well, the polis didn't pinch anny one. They were after a man who came in here an' then wint away ag'in."

"Who was he? Maybe I know him?"

"A felly be the name of Patsy. He came in here, met a man, an' they wint off together. 'Twas soon after this that the police came."

"Patsy is my friend," said Nick, quickly. "Where did he go? Do you know?"

"I don't. I didn't hear phat the other man said."

"Can you describe the other man?"

"Sure. He was a slim-built young man wid a saft voice an' a good enough face. A Chairly bye, I would say."

Nick thanked the saloon keeper and was about to move away when a tously headed man with a week's growth of beard on his face, who had been nodding in a chair, turned two bleary eyes on the detective and said: "I can tell you where them two marks went."

"You can?" spoke Nick, in some excitement. "Then do so."

"I was right here in this chair lookin' as if I was asleep when they did their mug work," the man said. "The little one spoke low, but I didn't miss a word. He said that the appointment here was a blind so as to deceive the other fellow and, that the real place was the 'Dingbat', on Water Street.

Nick looked at the speaker for some time. He was trying to place him. At last he succeeded. He was a former member of the police force who had lost his position on account of over-indulgence in strong drink. His honesty had never been questioned, and Nick knew that the man's only appearances in court were caused by chronic drunkenness.

On the sidewalk the detective considered the situation. The fact that the appointment at Big Andy's was a blind made him think that he, not Patsy, was the one the enemy was aiming at. The person who had met Patsy was, of course, Meg Alverson, and the plan, so it appeared to Nick, was to lure him, with Patsy as the bait, to the "Dingbat," one of the most disreputable joints in the city. Well, he would go there, but not until he had phoned the nearest police station.

In half an hour he was on Water street in the vicinity of the "Dingbat."

At the door of a dingy, low-ceilinged barroom located in a two-storied weather-beaten wooden building, he paused and stroked his chin.

There were a dozen or more tough-looking persons in the barroom and one of them beckoned to the detective.

Nick did not enter but did some beckoning himself. It was close upon evening, and after dark there would be danger outside as well as inside.

The man who had beckoned came to the door.

He was a tall, muscularly built fellow, with a red face and shifty, pale blue eyes.

When he spoke, Nick had difficulty in repressing a start. One of his assailants of the night before, the man who had used the sandbag, had spoken twice. The

voice was peculiar. It was harsh and had an accent, the accent of the Cornishman.

"I have seen you many times, Mister Carter," the man said, pleasantly, "and I have often wanted to meet you. Won't you come in and wet your lips with me?"

The voice was the voice of the sandbagger.

Nick came to a quick conclusion. He would go in. To stay outside after the man had spoken might render his mission to the joint a barren one. Therefore he entered.

CHAPTER III.

A NEW ALLY APPEARS.

Nick's companion led the way to the bar counter, and, addressing the bullet-headed person behind it, requested him to give the gentleman, indicating the detective, what he wanted.

Nick did not purpose taking the chances of a knock-out play and therefore called for a mild cigar.

The treater showed no surprise. He smiled slightly and nominated straight whisky as his selection.

Having placed himself on the outside of the fiery stuff, he became confidential. With his back to the counter and his elbows resting upon it, he began what Nick shrewdly divined was the opening of his game.

"I don't know why you are here, Mr. Carter, and I don't wish to know. The fact that you are not in disguise"—the detective frowned, for now he was sorry that he had not come to the place in an assumed character—"shows that you are not on the trail of an important criminal. If you were, I might be able to help you."

He paused, tried to read the expression of his listener's face, and then went on: "I am in the business, myself; that is, I am a private detective."

Nick conjured up a look of smiling surprise. "Are you?" he said. "Then I'm very glad to meet you. What is your name?"

"James Setoun." He laughed and added: "My friends call me 'Jim Satan'."

"A very appropriate name," thought Nick. What he said was: "I don't suppose you mind it so long as you can make it hot for the guns."

"No, I take the nickname as a compliment." He produced a black cigar, bit off the end, and was soon smoking.

Nick swept the barroom with his eyes. There were a few loungers, but the majority of the habitués were clustered about a large round table at the farther end of the room.

He observed that there were two doors inside, one at the rear and the other on the side a few feet below the bar.

Just before Jim Satan resumed his talk, Nick saw the side door open slightly. It closed softly when Satan again spoke.

"I remarked when I came up to you outside that I have often wanted to meet you. You and I ought to pull together. You are out for the stuff and so am I. But don't mistake," he continued quickly as he saw Nick's mouth harden. "I am an operator within the law. So are you. Therefore, our business will be open and aboveboard."

"What can he be driving at?" thought the detective. "The game he is playing promises to be decidedly interesting."

Jim Satan appeared to guess what was going on in his listener's mind, for a quiet smile played about his thin lips.

"I have a case on now," he continued, "and I would like to have you go in with me. There's big money in it."

"I am open to conviction," replied Nick.

"Good. Here is the layout: A couple of cheap marks have lately done some big business. They had a fool for a victim or they would never have made a go of their scheme. They dragged thousands of dollars and about ten thousand dollars' worth of jewelry out of an easy mark living on Long Island. I haven't called on him, but it's a good betting proposition that he will pay well for the recovery of the stolen goods."

Nick Carter stared hard at the speaker. Then, as he met Jim Satan's searching gaze, he said, in affected surprise: "How did you learn that this game had been worked?"

"By accident," was the cool, easy response. "I have rooms on the East Side. My next door neighbors are the two marks I have alluded to. The partition between my bedroom and theirs is of thin boards. They were talking last night, and I heard the whole story of the hold up of the Long Island sucker. Thinks I to myself, 'here's a chance to present the hilarious amateurs with a Florida lemon of the biggest size.' But the job is a delicate one, and two men can handle it better than one. So it's up to you to become my partner or see at least five thousand go a glimmering."

Nick brought his hand to his chin and appeared to deeply consider the proposition. He saw the game. Jim Satan was playing to get the detective in his power. The fellow was the tool of Mrs. Smithers and Meg Alverson, and a most ingenious plot for the undoing of Nick had been concocted. It might have had some chance of success had not Nick identified Jim Satan as one of the Long Island assailants. The villain, of course, had no suspicion that he had been spotted. Nick, therefore, held the best card.

"Well," said Satan, "what do you say? Is it a whack?"

"Yes," replied Nick, "I'll go you."

"Then let us go upstairs and talk over details. This public barroom is no place for the transaction of such business as ours."

The detective smelled a trap, but he did not hesitate before responding. To have done so would have excited the villain's suspicions. He said, with a shake of his head: "I will go with you, certainly, but not until I have learned what became of a friend of mine

who came to this place an hour or more ago. That is my business here."

"Who is your friend?" Satan spoke sharply.

Nick at once resolved to be frank and tell Satan all about Patsy and the connection of both himself and his assistant with the Gerald Laken case. He would not be exposing any secret, for Satan, of course, knew that Nick was engaged on the Laken case and that Patsy had been lured to the saloon.

The smooth villain heard the story and affected the greatest surprise. "Well, I never!" he ejaculated. "So you are already on the case. Isn't it lucky that you and I came together here? You are after the two marks—I never suspected they are women—but you don't know where they are hiding. I do and I will take you straight to the place after we have investigated this business of Patsy's."

Nick now felt easier in mind. "Perhaps you saw him," he remarked. "How long have you been in the saloon?"

"I came in about ten minutes before you showed up, Mr. Carter."

This answer was expected. Nick then turned to the barkeeper and, after describing Patsy, asked if the young detective had been in the saloon at any time since four o'clock. It was now seven.

"Sure he did, sor. He wint up them stairs," pointing to the door on the side, "about an hour ago. Av coorse he's up there now."

Jim Satan with a beaming countenance exclaimed: "What luck! Things are coming our way with a rush. I'll gamble one of the marks we are after is up there with your man. Say," to the barkeeper, "who went upstairs with this gentleman's friend?"

"A little mon. I niver see him before. He said he wanted a private room where he could play cairds an' the quiet. I sint him upstairs."

Nick thought of the door which had opened and closed a short time before, and believed that either Mrs. Smithers or Meg Alverson was in the upstairs room. He did not believe much of what the barkeeper had said. He knew the reputation of the joint and how the proprietor and his employees protected the thieves and thugs of that quarter of the city.

"I am not a coward," he said to Jim Satan, with an earnestness that was meant to and did deceive the villain, "but I don't intend to butt into a hornet's nest. To go up there might invite a knife thrust. A detective should exercise discretion. He should not be foolhardy. Suppose we ask the barkeeper to open the door and call down the occupants of the room?"

Jim Satan bit his lip in angry vexation. The proposal was a reasonable one, but it did not chime in with the evil programme the villain had mapped out. But he could offer no plausible objection to it.

One of the men at the round table in the corner arose from his seat at this juncture, and seeing him gave Satan a new idea.

He said to Nick: "Go ahead and tell the barkeep what you want done," and when the detective had turned his back he beckoned to the man who had left the table and, pointing to Nick, made an expressive gesture.

The man signaled was short and stoutly built and had a bulldog face.

The barkeeper received Nick's request and moved toward the door which opened on the stairway. The detective turned and met with a surprise.

The short man was upon him. What was intended for a crushing blow in the jaw just missed execution by a quick twist of the detective's head.

Then ensued as interesting a fight as had ever taken place in that joint of fights.

Nick had two men to contend with, for as soon as the short man made his attack, Jim Satan threw off the mask and with murderous intent sought to aid his associate in crime.

Nick was not at his best on account of his recent weakening experience, but he fought like a demon. A right-hander at the point of the chin sent the short fellow to the floor, and another blow given with the left hand caught Jim Satan between the eyes and sent him staggering against the bar counter.

Now it was that the bullet-headed barkeeper took a hand. Rushing behind the counter he grabbed a policeman's billy and, reaching over the counter, aimed a vicious blow at the detective's head.

Nick did not see the move to get the weapon, for at that moment he was occupied with Jim Satan, who, recovering from the left-hander, had drawn a knife and was preparing to use it.

Nick drew back just as the barkeeper's billy was raised. It was necessary that he should give attention to the short man now in the act of arising to his feet. A kick caused the fellow to jump up with a yell, and his head reached the level of the counter in time to receive the blow intended for the detective. Down he went with a heavy thud, and the subsequent proceedings were without interest to him.

The crowd of loungers and card players now advanced, and at a word from Jim Satan, who was trying to steady himself against the counter, they would have thrown themselves on the detective if a newcomer had not suddenly appeared upon the scene.

Into the saloon rushed a young German of fair complexion and flaxen hair. His red cheeks were flushed with excitement and anger, and with a drawn revolver he warned the crowd to keep back.

"Soxteen to vun," he shouted in indignation. "You ought to be ashamed oof mineselluf. Dake a dumble, aind it? Go pack der vay you cooms vrom or I vill maig some pig holes indo you, vot?"

The German swung his pistol so that it was on a line with Jim Satan's head. The crowd had now ceased to be offensive.

"Vot's der mädder mit you, you pig stig in der mut? Oh, I see, vunce. You peen indroducings you vace to dot gentlemans mit de tubble upper chaw preakers. Gif him a gouple more vor lug. I led you do dot, py chiminy."

Nick laughed. He fixed a steady gaze on his new ally and would have spoken if at that moment a squad of officers had not rushed into the saloon. These were the men Nick had asked for over the 'phone before coming to the place. He had expected their appearance sooner.

Jim Satan saw them coming and quickly made for the door on the side.

The movement was so sudden that Nick was not able to intercept him before he reached the door. Up the stairs the fugitive went, the detective at his heels, and the German and some of the policemen after the detective.

Satan dashed into the upstairs room, which was empty, opened a door at the back and, reaching an alley below, fled like the wind and succeeded in making his escape.

Nick Carter did not give up the pursuit until all trace of the villain had been lost.

Returning to the saloon he found the short man under arrest. The detective accompanied the officers and their prisoner to the police station, but not until a thorough search of the saloon premises had been made. Patsy was not there.

The barkeeper was not taken in charge, his statement that he had assisted Nick Carter by laying out the short man not meeting with any denial by the great detective.

Nick believed the barkeeper had been in collusion with Satan, but he did not think that the fellow's services extended further than an attempt to hoodwink the detective in the matter of Patsy's visit to the joint. It was not likely that the barkeeper knew where Patsy had been taken. The young detective, so Nick thought, had gone up to the room and from there had descended to the alley in the company of the villain who had lured him to Water Street.

Nick asked the young German to accompany him to the police station. "After I have had a talk with the prisoner, I would like to have a chat with you," he said. "You have done me a great favor, and I would like to reciprocate if I can."

"Dot's all right," replied the other, with a laugh. "You dond owe me noddings. Vot I do vor you I do vor minselluf any dime, dot's so."

"I don't believe you are a selfish person," said Nick, smilingly.

"Den you ged vooled, alretty. I got a moddo dot I piged oop in Ghergargo vere I coom vrom tay pehind gesterday. I vound id in a Yarman nusenbaper. Here id vos: 'Lie low und saw vood.' Dot means geep de vood, dond gif id avay."

"That is an American gag," remarked the detective. "Your German paper appropriated it."

"Who vos der fairst man vot vefer sawed vood?" asked the German.

"I don't know."

"Vell, I dond know neider, bud der byramit puilders used pronze saws ven dey puilded dose svinxes, alretty. Vere vos der Amerigans, den? Dey vos Ghineses or der losd dribes oof Israel Butnam, I dond dink. Derevore der byramit puilders got a righd to sdard dot choke, aind it? Und oof dey hat, dere peen blendy sdealings oof dot choke efer since, vot?"

"I won't argue the point," said Nick, "for we are close to the station."

The young German waited in the captain's office while the detective was engaged with the prisoner.

Looking at the man closely, Nick became convinced that before him was the thug who had worn the blue overcoat on the occasion of the assault at Long Island.

Acting upon this belief, he opened the conversation by saying:

"It is rather cool in here. If you wish, I will send you the overcoat you lost last night."

The prisoner started and turned pale. Giving Nick a furtive look he replied: "I ain't lost no overcoat."

Nick came close to the man and looked sharply, not into the man's eyes, but at the man's neck.

"I observe," he said, quietly, "that your neck still bears the marks of my fingers. I am sure the fingers that produced the marks are mine, because one of my thumbs has no pointed nail. I hurt that thumb a month ago, and the nail came off. The new nail, as you may see, has grown only halfway to the end of the thumb."

"What are yer givin' me?" questioned the prisoner, gruffly.

"Medicine exactly suited to your case. The marks on your neck reveal the fact of a nailless thumb. I've got you, and you might as well own up."

The prisoner was silent a moment and then exclaimed in disgust: "What's ther use? I knew when I went in with Jim Satan to do you up that you would do us up. I told him he was tacklin' a tough proposition, but he said he'd figgered out a way ter win. An' here I be."

"What's your name?"

"Shorty Blinn."

"You have been a yeggman, haven't you?"

"Sure. Pinched more times than I have got hairs on my block. Never had any sense. I was born a fool."

"You were certainly a fool to join forces with Jim Satan. He is a hoodoo."

"Did you get him?"

"No, but I will."

"Curse him! I hope you do get to his collar bone. If I am to get a dose of Sing-twice, I want Jim to swallow the same stuff."

Nick Carter was immensely pleased at the way Blinn was taking his imprisonment. He was satisfied from the man's words and manner that he would confess all he knew respecting Jim Satan and the two plotters, Meg Alverson and Mrs. Smithers.

"I presume you are willing to help me catch Satan," asked Nick, tentatively.

"Help you, sure. I know where he hangs out. It's on Broome street, away down number ——. I was there with him last night."

"Does the person who hired him to 'do' me live in that quarter?"

"Don't know the other parties, never seen 'em. Jim dealt with them and then guv me the dope."

The detective was disappointed. "Didn't Jim give you any pointers about them?" he asked.

"Oh, he chewed the mitt some about 'em. Said they—there are two of 'em—were foxy guys an' that they knew how to play the game. He never told me where they live."

"Did he tell you their names?"

"Yes. One was called Harry somethin' an' the other Mrs. Smithers."

"The 'Harry' is also a woman. Didn't you know that?"

"Never a once, s' help me. Is that so?"

Shorty Blinn's surprise was genuine.

Nick asked other questions but all he learned was that the man was to receive two hundred dollars if the great detective ceased to exist.

Returning to the office Nick found the young German asleep in a chair.

He awoke with a start when the detective touched him on the shoulder.

"Chiminy Gris'mas! bud id vos so varm und k'viet dot I ged some sleebines coom ofer me. I dond sleeb vell last nighd. Der lumbs on dot ped dond vit mine pack, alretty."

"I'll find you a better sleeping place," said Nick, kindly. "By the way, I have not yet asked you your name and occupation."

They were now on the street. The young German made a comical mouth.

"My name is Fritz Osterhaus. I vorked in der packing houses in Ghegargo und de poss gall me Oysterhouse. He dought dot mighd pe vunny, vot?"

"Doing anything in New York?"

"Nein. I peen loogin' vor an easy yob. Maype you know oof von. I gan reat, r-r-ite und blay der chews-harp."

"You ought to have been an actor. You would make a success as a comedian."

"Do you dink so?" regarding Nick in sober inquiry. "Mine ooncle in Milwowky say dot, too. Vot *you* do? I pet you got a goot yob."

"I am a detective. Didn't the captain tell you?"

"Nein, I say noddings to dot gaptain. I dond lige his loogs. He got a pad eye."

Young Osterhaus enjoyed Nick's evident amusement over the talk. He chuckled and tossed his head as he walked along the sidewalk.

They went to Broome street, and finding a patrolman, the detective explained what he required, and the three, Nick, the officer, and the young German, proceeded to the house named by Shorty Blinn as the lodging place of Jim Satan.

But the lodger had left. The landlady said the man had given up his room an hour before.

"I didn't expect to find the rascal there," said Nick to Osterhaus as they left the building. "He probably figured on the squealing of his associate and took action accordingly."

The young German was devoured by curiosity, and so Nick told the whole story of the operations of Meg Alverson and Mrs. Smithers.

Osterhaus listened with wide-open mouth. "Py Chiminy," he said, "but I vish I gould hellup you; maype I gan do dot. I vatch de East zide und oof I see dot Chames Zatan I leds you know."

"Very well," replied Nick, "I am willing that you should try." Then he added: "It is near midnight. I must hurry to catch a car. I have got to meet a man to-night."

"Vill I see you py to-morrow?" asked Osterhaus.

"I shall be in Astoria, Long Island, to-morrow. Come to Gerald Laken's residence on —— Avenue to-morrow afternoon whether you have anything to report or not. I may have other work for you."

After the parting, Nick took an "L" train at First Avenue and close upon one o'clock reached the hotel where Gerald Laken had registered.

The millionaire had not retired. He had been expecting Nick's coming, and greeted him with the anxious inquiry: "Have you done anything?"

The detective told his story and Laken sighed. "Poor Patsy!" he said. "I am afraid he has been killed."

Nick shook his head. "No, he is alive. That is my feeling, and I am going to hold to it until——"

"Until you see his dead body?"

"Yes. Mrs. Smithers wants my life. Patsy does not figure on her list of victims. I believe he is a prisoner, and that an attempt will be made to use him to ensnare me. But 'forewarned is forearmed,'—and I will keep my eyes open and my powder dry."

The detective had engaged a room adjoining that occupied by Laken, and half an hour after his conversation with the millionaire he was sleeping soundly.

He had slept about an hour, as was afterward ascertained, when the sound of a heavy fall caused him to rise up in bed with wide-open eyes.

CHAPTER IV.

SOME UNDERHAND WORK.

Nick Carter listened for other sounds, and hearing none, got out of bed and rapidly put on his clothes. The sound that had awakened him appeared to have come from one of the adjoining rooms. What had caused it? He thought of Gerald Laken, and an awful fear seized him. What if the satanic enemy had invaded the millionaire's apartment and out of revenge had killed him?

Laken, by securing the services of a detective, had committed an act which, under the code of conduct followed by the more desperate and dangerous breakers of the law, called for deadly reprisal.

Nick shoved back the bolt of his door and then grasped the key to find that the door was unlocked.

He could have sworn that he locked the door before retiring. The discovery increased his uneasiness.

The enemy had been at work, and the detective as well as the detective's employer had been marked for destruction.

Arrived at Laken's door he found it locked. This was strange. It did not fit in with the uncomfortable theory he had just formulated.

He listened at the keyhole and heard the sound of deep and regular breathing. His face was clearing, and he was beginning to think that he had been "making a mountain out of a mole's hill," when his sharp ears caught the sound of soft feet moving about the millionaire's room.

Instantly his fears returned, and with them a suspicion that made his eyes snap and his breath come faster.

There was some one in that room who had no right there, some one who had surreptitiously entered and then relocked and rebolted the door.

The fall—some person had fallen, Laken, probably—and the starting up in bed of the detective—he must have made a noise in doing so—had prevented the unknown intruder from making his escape from Laken's apartment. He was now there, endeavoring, with poor success, to make Nick think that nothing had happened to the millionaire.

Nick looked up and down the corridor hoping to catch sight of an attaché of the hotel. But no one appeared. It was then but an hour or two before dawn, and no one in the upstairs section was stirring.

The detective did not like to leave his position even to reënter his own room and ring up the office. Move as softly as he might, it was probable that his door would creak or that he might make some noise that would reach the alert ears of the enemy.

There was a fire escape outside of Laken's window, and Nick believed that the intruder would try to leave the room by means of the ladder. That he had not done so before this was probably due to the fact that the window was closed, and that he did not dare to raise it while the detective was listening outside. "He is hoping," Nick thought, "that I will go away satisfied that nothing has occurred to cause suspicion that all is not as it should be in Laken's room."

The moments went by and Nick could hear the deep breathing but no other sound.

Something must be done, for the delay was irritating.

Nick Carter at last concluded to act. Stepping quickly to his own door, he opened it, making some little noise as he did so, and then hastened back to the millionaire's door.

He reached there to hear the window inside rattle as the intruders raised it.

With a mighty rush the detective assaulted the door. It shook, the panels cracked, but the lock and bolt did not give way.

Another attempt and the door fell in.

Into the room, revolver in hand, hurried Nick to find the window open, the intruder gone, and lying on the floor the huddled-up form of Gerald Laken.

Giving one sorrowful glance at the body of the millionaire, the detective rushed to the window and looked down. A pistol bullet grazed his ear and embedded itself in the window frame above him.

Without withdrawing his head, Nick fired at a short man in a summer overcoat who had just reached the ground. The shot was ineffective, for the man must have been expecting it. He dodged and then ran down the alley which intersected the block.

With rage in his heart, Nick turned and made for the corridor. There he met the night clerk and a number of excited patrons of the hotel. Quickly stating that it was a case of burglary and perhaps murder, he asked that an immediate examination of the body of Laken be made, and then hastened to the elevator and was lowered to the first floor.

In the office he met two patrolmen. They had heard the shots and had seen a man running out of the alley. Another policeman was now in pursuit of him.

Nick went to the alley, but it was deserted. There was nothing to be done, then; he must wait for the return of the pursuing patrolman.

While he was standing at the alley entrance with a gloomy brow, the night clerk joined him.

"Mr. Laken," the clerk said, "is not dead. He is not even badly injured. He was struck on the head with a club or something and he lost his senses. We threw water over his face and gave him some brandy. When I left him just now he was sitting on the bed and talking rationally."

Nick's fine face shone like the sun. "You couldn't have brought me better news," he replied. "I feared that he had been murdered."

In a short time the patrolman, who had followed the burglar, came up the alley. His pursuit had been unsuccessful. The burglar had escaped.

There was no more sleep for either Nick Carter or Gerald Laken that night. They sat and talked until it was time for breakfast.

The millionaire's head was swollen, but his mind was active and he talked freely.

"I don't know when or how that fiend got in," he said. "I must have been sound asleep when I received that nasty blow on the head. But why did he not kill me? He could have done so, you know."

"True," replied Nick, "but to have killed would have been to kill the goose that was the producer of golden eggs. My opinion is that you were being disciplined. By the way, did you lock and bolt your door before you retired?"

Laken scratched his head. "I don't remember. The fact is, I was so confoundedly sleepy after my talk with you that I have but an indistinct remembrance of what I did in preparation for getting between the sheets."

"It is evident that you did neither of these two essential things, for the lock has not been tampered with. I was more fortunate. My door was secured against unlawful intrusion. Our enemy tried to get into my room, and if he had succeeded, I might not

be here at this moment talking to you. The burglar spared your life. He would not have been as considerate in my case."

"Who was the burglar and would-be assassin? Mrs. Smithers?"

"No. Mrs. Smithers is a very tall woman. This fellow was short."

"Meg Alverson, then?"

"I believe so."

After breakfast Nick went to his residence, hoping to find there some message from Patsy. He met with disappointment. But Joseph, the valet, handed the detective a letter which had arrived that morning by special delivery.

The letter was from Meg Alverson, and its perusal produced both smiles and frowns.

"My dear chronic minder of other people's business," it said, "I am aching to have a heart-to-heart talk with you. But as circumstances may prevent a meeting for a day or two, I must trust to my pen to make known to you certain matters that concern you deeply. Right here let me tell you that I have so high a regard for your abilities as a detective, particularly for your perspicacity, that I must presume that you already know that you are, in this case of Gerald Laken, opposed by Mrs. Smithers and your former Boston antagonist, Meg Alverson.

"Mrs. S. has got it in for you. She is a vindictive creature, and there is no holding her back when once she has made up her mind to do a thing. Your life hangs by a hair. There is no escape for you unless you consent to come to my terms. If you will drop the Laken case, leave the field clear for us—we know how to manage Mr. Easy Mark—Patsy will come back to you with a whole skin. Refuse to accept this proposal and Patsy hits the sweet subsequently with his poor little toes pointed upward. We have got him, and he is where you can never find him.

"Perhaps you think I am dealing in hot air. Reflect a minute and you will see that we are not to be trifled with. Remember what occurred last night. I could have got into your room in spite of the lock and bolt, but my heart failed me. I went away from the door resolving to give you one more chance. We want Laken's money, not all of it, but a part of it. The little rap I gave him last night was to remind him he is not to suppose because you have taken charge of his case that we are going to let up on him.

"What I have here written, my foxy Nicholas, is the cold, deadly truth. Mrs. Smithers is running the tragic part of the game, and she is armed for business. You will be given twenty-four hours for consideration. A personal in the *Herald* to-morrow morning stating that the terms of the M. A. are accepted will be understood and Patsy's release will immediately follow. A failure to insert the personal will mean instant death to your assistant. Have I written plainly?

"Yours emphatically,

"Meg Alverson."

"Twenty-four hours," muttered the detective. "Much may be done in that time. But if I fail in spiking the guns of these two fiends, what then?" He sat for some moments in deep thought. At last his brow cleared. A smile came into his face. "There is a way," he said to himself, "that will prevent murder. I don't like to try it, but I will, if the matter comes to a pinch."

In the middle of the forenoon Nick and Laken left New York for the millionaire's home. They found things at the mansion as they had left them.

Shortly after noon who should walk up to the front porch, upon which the detective and Laken were sitting, but Chick and a tall man wearing handcuffs.

The prisoner was Jim Satan.

Nick Carter, with an exclamation of joy, hastened down the steps to greet his successful assistant.

"How in the name of all the saints did you manage to gather in this fellow?" he asked. "You've got a prize."

Chick exhibited the greatest satisfaction. "I imagined you would like to see Mr. Satan," he replied, "and so I brought him along."

"Where did you find him?"

"At a hobo jungle in Morrisiana."

The prisoner was conveyed to a strong room in the basement and locked in. Before the door an under gardener was placed as guard.

Gerald Laken was greatly excited over Chick's performance, and after Satan had been caged, he hurried the two detectives to his den.

"Now," said the millionaire, "tell us your story. I know from your looks that it is a most interesting one."

Comfortably settled in an easy-chair and with a fragrant Havana between his fingers, Chick, in a happy mood, began: "I played in luck and deserve little credit for what I have done. I was not after Jim Satan. My instructions were to look for a short, stocky man, the man who wore the blue overcoat.

"On reaching the other side of the river I went to a costume shop kept by a man Nick and I have had frequent dealings with, and procured a hobo disguise. I have played the part many times, and therefore with the utmost confidence began my hunt for hobo haunts. On Houston street I met a yeggman. He was easy to spot, and we quickly struck up an acquaintance. I told him I was recently from the west and knew nothing about the hobo holes on Manhattan Island and vicinity.

"The yegger was willing to go with me to the ends of the earth after we had investigated an underground saloon, and I had caused to be thrown a few jolts down his knotty and weather-beaten neck. First, he said he would take me to a crib in Brooklyn. It was in an old, deserted barn about a mile from Coney Island. The improvements had come pretty close to it, and we found the hoboes preparing to leave. They had got wind of a contemplated raid by the officers, who had been aroused by the complaints of citizens, and were

taking time by the forelock. My man was not there, but a few judicious inquiries made me think I would find him at a jungle in Morrisiana.

"Thither we went and in the jungle, a brush hollow among the trees, we passed the night. Early this morning a newcomer appeared, the fellow called Jim Satan. It was not getting-up time when he arrived, but I was awake and I heard him ask the captain of the gang if 'Shorty' were there.

"The word 'Shorty' made me prick up my ears. I looked at the speaker sharply, and the thought came to me that he might be the tall man who used the revolver on your head, Nick, while you were choking the short one. The reply to the fellow's question was, 'Ain't seen him fer two days.' The next words of the tall man seemed to resolve my conjecture into certainty.

"Then, 'Shorty' has been pinched. I was afraid of it. I left him in a hole last night. 'What's he up agin'?' asked the captain of the hoboes. 'Rough house in a Water Street joint,' was the reply. No more was said, then. The tall man hunted a place for a snooze and stayed there for a couple of hours.

"While the hoboes were preparing breakfast, I asked my friend, the yegg, if he knew the tall man. 'Yes, I knows him, slightually,' he said. 'He's not one of us, but he hikes in once in a while and drops a few bones. Acts of that kind have put him solid with the gang. His name's Jim Satan. If he's got another, I never heard of it.'

"'Was this fellow Shorty his pal?' I asked.

"'Sure. They worked together, Shorty doin' the rough work an' Jim usin' his block.'

"That was all I wanted. I had lost Shorty, or rather he had been found by some one else—and I thought I spotted your handiwork, Nick—but I had discovered his partner, the brainy one of the pair, and, therefore, the one to be feared. I waited until Satan woke up, and then I prepared for some delicate work. I knew it would be impossible to arrest Satan there in the jungle, for the whole mob of hoboes would stand by him and beat the life out of me. I must play fox.

"I had had my breakfast stew, and I had the shivers. It was right, in a physical sense, that I should leave the jungle, and it was right, in a professional sense, that I should do so."

"It was lucky for me that the fellow knew but three or four of the gang. There are changes every day, as you know, Nick, some going away and others coming in. The yegg, who stuck to me because he knew I had a dollar or two in my jeans, introduced me to Satan as an old partner who had just blown in from Chicago. I did not say much nor did I appear to pay much attention to the fellow. But after he had tackled the stew they had for breakfast and had shown a marked disgust at the truck, I whispered into the yegg's ear: 'Ask him to come over to Harlem and get a square in a restaurant. Tell him you are going there, and that you draw the line at that Mulligan.'

"The yegger promised, and Satan eagerly jumped at the chance of getting away from the place. But he did not go until he had disguised himself. He made no explanation for this action, and no questions were asked by the hoboes. He flung a dollar at the captain, and then we three slid out of the jungle.

"Before we entered the restaurant in Harlem I slipped some money into the yegg's hand and whispered: 'Something may happen inside. Whatever you see, remember that it is none of our business. You are all right, so long as you don't meddle. Shut up, no questions. I am running this funeral.'

"The yegger blinked his little eyes and looked scared, but I shook my head at him and put on an ugly expression. Satan was walking ahead of us, and did not cop my pantomime.

"In the restaurant a table in a corner was found, and we three sat down and the yegger did the ordering. The proprietor knows me, and I gave him a wink when I entered. He is his own waiter—the place is a small one—and after he had filled the yegger's order, he stood by the table and looked at me. Now was my time. I sat by the side of Satan. The yegger had the other side of the table to himself. Satan had knife and fork in hand, and was about to tackle the grub when I suddenly grasped him by the wrists and pushed him backward out of his chair. The yegg jumped up in amazement, but a word from the restaurant keeper caused him to resume his seat.

"I needed no help in overcoming my man. I was there for business, and my fists soon drove all the sense from my victim's head. Inside of two minutes he was handcuffed. When I got to my feet I addressed the yegger: 'My friend,' said I, 'the farce is played. This mucker on the floor is under arrest. I know something of your record. Wouldn't it be the part of policy for you to seek the sequestration of—of the country beyond Jersey City, for instance?'

"The yegger gave me a wild look, and then made a bolt for the door."

"He must have been a machinist," Nick put in, with a wink at Laken.

Chick grinned. "He has been a locksmith," he rejoined, "for he had the lockstep." Then he resumed, soberly:

"I marched my man to the nearest railway station, rode to the ferry, and came here. On the way, for prudential reasons, I discarded my disguise."

"I think there was something more than luck in your adventure," remarked the millionaire. "You had to use your wits, and the result shows that you have them in plenty."

"Oh, I don't know," replied Chick, with a slight blush.

Soon after this recital Fritz Osterhaus appeared. He was introduced to Laken and Chick, and heard with the liveliest satisfaction of the arrest of Jim Satan.

"Der game is in you own hants, now, Mr. Garder," he said. "You had got der dools, und now it oughd to be easy to gatch der brincibals. Maig dot Chames

Zatan sgueal und you get der whole pizniss, py chimbny."

"He may refuse to talk," responded Nick.

"Gif him der theerd tegree. Dot may vetch him."

"I'll have a talk with him after a while. And now, what have you got to report? Anything?"

"Nein. I find me noddings. I valgs all ofer dot East Zide und I nefer seen eider oof der dwo vimmenses."

"I didn't expect that your search would be successful. Meg and Mrs. Smithers are in hiding now. They won't show themselves in public for a day or two."

"Und vy vill dey coom ouid, den, Mr. Garder?"

"I hope it will be because I have brought them out," was the sober answer.

"Now you vos dalkin'. I lige to hear you say dot, alretty. Bud id may dake longer as a tay or dwo to gatch dose beobles. Dey vos sharp as sdeel drapses. I haf a suchschestion to maig, Mr. Garder. Haf Mrs. Laken coom home righd avay. Use der delegraf—'imbordant, coom py der nexd drain.'"

"Send for Mrs. Laken?" said the millionaire in astonishment. "The proposition is preposterous."

"I dond dink so," replied Osterhaus calmly. "Mype dot you dond kibbige my itea. Oof she vos here you could go mit her to Europe, alretty. Den you both vould pe avay vrom der tanger zonzes."

"But," protested Laken, "she is all right where she is, and here I am protected by Mr. Carter. You are talking nonsense," the speaker concluded, in some irritation.

The German's face was placid. "So you dink dot she is zafe vere she is town in Vlorita? How you know dot?"

Laken turned pale, and his eyes sought Nick Carter's.

The great detective was smiling. "There is no present cause for alarm," he said. "Your enemies are in New York, not Florida."

"But they may go there or send agents?"

"Yes, they may be one or the other, but it is not likely."

Laken breathed a sigh of relief. "It is best that she should stay where she is," he said, after a pause. "If she should come up here while my enemies are at large they might turn their attention to her. If they threatened to kill me, if she did not pay them money, her check book would be out instanter."

"Maype dot vould nod pe so," quietly spoke Fritz Osterhaus. "Avder Mr. Garder haf dalked to her she vouldn't pe so sgared, I dond dink. Petter dot she should coom up und pe py you. Dond drust dose vients to geep avay vrom Vlorida."

"On second thought," said Nick, "I am inclined to favor my friend, Osterhaus' plan. Yes, it is best that she should be here. But not to stay. As soon as she arrives you could put her on your yacht, Mr. Laken, and steam with her to the Mediterranean. Your enemies could not follow you, or, rather, they would not. With you and your wife out of New York my work would be easier, that is if there should be occasion for work. I hope," with a curious smile, "to be able to catch the pair before many days."

Young Osterhaus looked pleased. "Oof you do dot, all righd, bud I dond vand Mrs. Laken to coom py no tangers. I lige de udder segses, und I vight fon dem efery dime, vot?"

Gerald Laken gave Osterhaus an appreciative look. "I shall tell my wife what a nice fellow you are," he said. "And," he added, "to show you that I have changed my mind concerning your suggestion, I will at once write a telegram to Mrs. Laken and have it taken to the office."

While the millionaire was engaged with a telegraph blank Nick, Chick, and Osterhaus went out of doors.

As the young German had a desire to see the prisoner, Chick took him to the basement and had the under gardener unlock the door of the room of detention.

The room had been constructed to confine a brown bear that Mr. Laken had purchased from a showman who was going out of business. The walls were of stone, and there were two barred windows. The door was made of heavy oak, of double thickness, and was provided with a stout lock and bar connections. The bars could not be operated with the door locked. One turn of the big key released bar and doorbolt.

Jim Satan was discovered lying at full length on the stone floor. He arose to a sitting position when the door was opened and glared at his visitors.

"Not a very pretty sight, eh?" remarked Chick.

"Nein. He look lige he vand to ead somepody poody gwick, alretty. I vouldn't lige to meed dot man in der moons light, I dond dink."

The young German drew away with a shudder of repulsion. Satan smiled sardonically, and when the visitors had gone he began to whistle.

The next morning Nick Carter went to the basement for the purpose of talking with the prisoner.

The basement door was open, and at the foot of the steps he stopped in amazement.

The cell door was wide open, and in front of it lay the under gardener bound hand and foot and gagged.

CHAPTER V.

THE RESCUE OF PATSY.

With a black brow Nick stooped, cut the gardener's bonds and removed the gag. The man was alive and in his senses. A lump on the side of his head spoke of a savage assault.

He sat up and began to rub his mouth. Meeting the detective's unpitying gaze, he whimpered: "I was fooled. Any man would have done as I did."

"I hope you may be able to convince me that you are blameless," returned Nick, coldly. "Last night I left you here armed with a revolver and my instructions to you were that you must shut and lock the door to this basement so that in the event of an at-

tempt to rescue the prisoner you would be in a position to prevent an entrance. The condition of things here shows that you did not follow the instructions. I come here this morning, find the basement door wide open, you tied up and gagged and the prisoner gone. What have you to say for yourself?"

The under gardener answered without shame: "I was fooled as I said before. I closed and locked the door up there, and I sat between it and the door of the cell. Along about one o'clock this morning I heard a tapping on the basement door. I kept as still as a mouse, for I thought some one was trying to get in. But pretty soon I came to another conclusion. Some one outside wanted to speak to me.

"I got up, ascended the steps and called out: 'Who's there?' The answer was, 'I am Mr. Carter. I have something particular to say to you.' I am no detective. I have got a good common school education, and I know a few things, and I guess I have a lot of things to learn. You ought not to have placed a plain, ordinary person in such a position of responsibility."

"The decision is yours," replied Nick, curtly. "Now go on with your story."

"Well, I unlocked the door. I had no suspicion that all was not right. I took the person outside to be you."

"How long was it before you discovered your mistake?" asked the detective, sourly.

The gardener made an effort to call up a grin. "About the millionth part of a second," he answered. "As I opened the door something occurred to my head, and I guess it must have been an hour before I realized what had happened to me."

"Did you see your assailant?"

"I caught a fleeting glimpse of a man in black. His face was covered."

"Tall or short?"

"Now you get me. I couldn't say. He looked tall, but he may have been short. I was standing a couple of feet below him when he handed me the sockdologer."

Nick left the gardener and proceeded to make inquiries among the other employees of the millionaire. But he obtained no information. The rescuer and the rescued had escaped from the grounds without having been seen and without having left a trace behind them.

The detective went into the house. Breakfast was over and Laken had gone to his den for a smoke. Chick and Fritz Osterhaus had accompanied him. The young German had stayed at the house over night at the invitation of the millionaire.

When the tale of the escape of Jim Satan was told, Chick frowned. "If I had taken the mucker to a police station instead of bringing him over here, he'd be caged at this minute. But I thought it best to bring the rascal to you, Nick. You were the doctor."

"You did what I wished you to do," said Nick. "We have met with a slight set back, but—'what can't be cured must be endured.' Of course, either Meg Alverson or Mrs. Smithers worked the job. In all probability this house has been under surveillance ever since the night of the assault on me."

"To-night my enemies look to me to hand up twenty thousand dollars," remarked Laken. "The money must be placed in the crotch of the old elm about a mile from here. We ought to catch whoever takes out the money or what will purport to be the money," with a sly glance at the great detective.

"That matter and one other will have to be considered to-day," returned Nick quietly. He thought of the deadly ultimatum that had been handed to him, but concluded not to refer to it.

"Id pe vell enough do pud somedings dot loogs lige creenpacks in dot dree und vatch ouid ven some von cooms do dake id avay, alretty," said Fritz Osterhaus, "bud I dink dot nopody vifl coom mit dot dree."

"What has caused you to come to that opinion?" asked Laken.

"Vot haf habbened apouid here maigs me dink dot de riskils haf made some ghanges in dere brograms. De gapture oof dis Zhorty veller und de gapture und guick git-avay oof Jim Zatan vill gif dose sgemers der notion dot you peen goin' do vight mit dem to der vinishes, vot?"

"Osterhaus is right," remarked Nick. "They are sharp enough to expect a plant to-night. You may put a package in the crotch of that tree, but it will stay there."

"How are we going to catch them, then?" asked the millionaire, in a tone of disappointment.

"By the aid of future developments, Mr. Laken."

"I hope the developments will not be long in coming."

"I don't think there will be much delay," said Nick, soberly.

Shortly after this conversation Nick had a long talk with Chick. At the conclusion of it Chick left the house and made his way toward the ferry.

The detective then hunted up Fritz Osterhaus and said: "I know you are willing to help in this case, and as Patsy is not able to give me his assistance, I shall let you have what would have been his detail. There are a number of shanties near Little Neck Bay, beyond Bayside. The railway will take you to Bayside. As you are a stranger here, I will give you full directions. Prospect those shanties and report here before dark."

The directions were given, and young Osterhaus set out with beaming face.

He walked along the hard, smooth road until he reached a station. There he waited for a train, and when one came he boarded it and inside of an hour was on the ground again and in sight of the shanties spoken of by Nick Carter.

Acting upon one of the instructions given by Nick, the young German had disguised himself as an old man, the make-up being furnished by the detective. The nationality, however, remained the same, Oster-

haus stating that he could not successfully hide his dialect. As a mendicant he rapped at the door of the first shanty he came to. A slatternly Italian woman heard his plea and shut the door in his face.

The next shanty, which occupied an isolated position in a grove of trees, was approached with elation, for the young German had seen the face of Jim Satan at the window.

A sharp rap at the door brought no response. Osterhaus smiled. In the pocket of his long-tailed coat was a revolver, and he brought it out and concealed it in his breast.

He rapped again, this time with a force that shook the building. A minute elapsed and then the door was opened a little way and the head of a woman appeared.

She was past middle age, and her face was hard and her eyes were snaky. "What do you want?" she demanded in a harsh voice. "Oh, I see."

The young German whipped out his revolver and pointed the muzzle at her head, thus interrupting her speech. "I vand Chames Zatan, Mrs. Smithers, und I vand you," he said, and as the woman started back Osterhaus pushed the door open and entered the room.

Jim Satan saw him and made a move to draw his pistol. He was not quick enough. A bullet fired from the weapon of the young German caught the villain between the eyes and he fell to the floor and after a few twitches ceased to breathe.

The disguised agent of Nick Carter turned to face the woman and saw her disappearing through the door connecting the two rooms of the shanty.

He ran after her, called out to her, and then fell over an obstruction in the shape of a dilapidated footstool just over the threshold.

As he picked himself up, he saw, through the back door which was open, the woman making swift tracks for the bay.

He was watching her when a muffled voice called out: "I'm down cellar."

There was a trapdoor with a padlock on one side of the room. The lock was smashed with an axe found standing by the side of a woodbox and the door was lifted.

Down the stairs hurried the young German to find a young man of about his own age chained to one of the supports of the kitchen floor.

The young man was Patsy, and as soon as he was released, Osterhaus said quickly: "I vos coom mit Nig Garder. You vill vind him ad Misder Lagen's in Astoria. Go dere und dell him dot I am ghasin' dot voomans, Mrs. Smithers."

Without further explanation Osterhaus went up the stairs and hurried toward the bay.

Patsy, weak from imprisonment and lack of food—he was in a starving condition—made his way slowly up the stairs and looked out of the back door. He caught sight of his rescuer and watched him until he saw him disappear among the trees. Then he went into the front room and experienced a thrill of fierce satisfaction when his eyes fell on the body of Jim Satan.

"That old Dutchy is a stem-winder," he said to himself. "I hope that he will run down that fiend of a Mrs. Smithers."

He sat down on the front steps and drew in deep breaths of the fresh, invigorating air. Ten minutes passed, and then some one came down the road toward the shanty. It was Chick.

"The Suffering Salt Peter!" ejaculated Nick's first assistant as he recognized Patsy. "Where did you drop from?"

"I did not drop from a hash factory," replied Patsy in a weak voice, but with a smiling face. "But," he added, "you must know what has happened. You came here with that old German, didn't you?"

"No, I came all by my lonesome. Nick thought there might be work out here for the two of us, I suppose. But it seems I am too late. The German has got ahead of me. Where is he?"

Patsy told Chick that the German had gone in pursuit of Mrs. Smithers. "He killed Jim Satan, rescued me from the cellar and then rushed off to catch or locate my jailer. He went toward the bay."

Chick emitted a low whistle. "So Jim Satan is dead, is he? Pity that Mrs. Smithers wasn't made to croak, too."

On the way to the Laken residence Patsy satisfied Chick's curiosity by relating his unfortunate experiences.

"I was at Nick's quarters awaiting orders when I was called to the 'phone. The voice was Nick's, as I supposed, and I was requested to come immediately to Big Andy's saloon on Pearl street. I went and was met at the door by a young man of slender build who stated that Nick was to be found at a notorious joint on Water Street. The Big Andy destination was a blind. Nick's enemies, the young fellow said, were watching Nick's every movement, and therefore extra precautions were necessary. 'Why,' he went on, 'they have fixed things so they can cop every message that goes out of Nick's house.'

"I took all this in, but not without a grain of salt. 'If what you say is true,' I replied, 'the enemy knows now that I am here. Therefore, I will be followed to Water Street. The appointment, then, might as well have been made for here as well as there.'

"My talk did not disturb the beautiful serenity of my companion. He had the ready answer. 'They will not succeed in following us,' he replied, 'for it will be easy to give them the slip. Trust to me for that.'

"Still I was not satisfied. 'Who are you?' I asked. 'I don't know you from Adam.'

"He smiled. My words seemed to please him. 'I am Meg Alverson, if you want to know,' was the response that nearly took me off my feet. 'I am supposed to be working with Mrs. Smithers,' the cunning cat continued, 'but as a matter of fact I am doing nothing of the kind. She is plotting to do Nick Carter. I wish to spoil her game. Nick Carter was kind to me

in Boston—that Jocko Smithers case, you know—and I want to repay that kindness. I have seen Nick, have given him a lot of pointers, and he wants you for some clever work to-night.'

"Say, Chick, her spiel for the moment flabbergasted me. What she said might be true, and yet it seemed too good to be true. I had not been posted fully on this Laken case. All I knew was that Nick was working on the assumption that Mrs. Smithers and Meg were concerned in it. Just what they had done to Laken I did not know, for Nick had given no details when he talked to you over the phone. At that time he was most interested in the muckers who jumped him in Astoria.

"Meg puffed at a cigarette while I dragged my brain for an intelligent idea. The more I debated the case the more off color seemed Meg's statement. But I must not let her suspect that I doubted her. At last I said, with an earnestness that I hoped would be taken for the show window article: 'I am going to place myself in your hands. I know you owe Nick for your escape from a prison sentence, and I shall bank on your sense of gratitude. Lead on,' here I struck a stage attitude—'I'll follow you.'"

Chick nodded. "There was nothing else for you to do," was his comment.

"Of course there wasn't. She had laid a trap for me, but my eyes were opened. It was my play to beat that trap and do a stunt for Nick. I could have arrested her, but I did not know whether or not Nick had a case against her. It would never do to take chances. An arrest without evidence would put Nick in a hole. It would render him liable for prosecution for false imprisonment, he might be sued for heavy damages and his reputation would suffer by the break. No, I couldn't pinch her, and so I went along with her, my mug composed and block working to beat the band."

"You didn't work it to much purpose," said Chick, with a shake of the head. Then he added, quickly, as he saw Patsy's eyes flash, "that is, you found that you had bitten off more than you could chew."

"See here, Chick," replied Patsy, sharply, "you think you have sized up that interesting female, but let me tell you that you are in the infant class as far as knowledge of Meg Alverson is concerned. She's the smoothest of the smooth. Wait till I tell you. She had not been deceived by my apparent faith in her honesty of purpose. Not for a minute. She knew when I started to walk off that I was onto her game. I did not guess her state of mind. That's where I missed it. That's why I lost."

"I beg your pardon," said Chick, contritely, "for the words I spoke. I had forgotten that she made a monkey of me in Boston, and that if it hadn't been for you I would have been in a pretty tight box."

"That's all right," was Patsy's response. "Fortune favored me, then, but the dame was taking a vacation when I encountered Meg on Pearl Street. But to get on with my story. We doubled, made quick sneaks, went into front doors and came out back doors, did the cab disappearance act and finally arrived on Water Street. When we were a block from the joint where Meg had said Nick was in waiting, my mind began to get very busy. I suspected that Mrs. Smithers was in the place and that she had her paw on the trap that was to catch poor little me. There should have been a patrolman in the vicinity, and I made up my mind not to enter the joint until I had seen and signaled to the officer. If I hoped to catch Mrs. Smithers it would be necessary to obtain the aid of one of the force. If I could get Mrs. Smithers in a position that would warrant her arrest on any charge, trivial or otherwise, Nick would have opportunity to get in his fine work on her. You understand?"

"Perfectly. And—did you lamp a patrolman?"

"Yes, and I was walking toward him so as to get near enough to give him a signal when something happened that spoiled my plan. We had come to a narrow open court not far from the joint. It was long before I learned that it connected with the back premises of the joint.

"As soon as we reached it, Meg Alverson gave me a shove and I fell into the arms of a man standing just inside the court. He had been waiting for me. If my eyes had not been on the patrolman when the court was reached, I would never have been caught out as I was.

"The man was an iron-fisted mucker, and he had me foul before I could bat an eye. Meg helped him and my block got all-that was coming to it. I was dippy for a long time, and when my lamps began to work again I became aware of the fact that I was being placed in a big box and also that I was not able to utter a sound.

"Next came a wagon ride and lastly an introduction to the cellar of Mrs. Smithers' country residence. I never saw Meg Alverson after my arrival at the shanty. But I was favored with many visits from her fiendish partner. She was my jailer, and she amused herself by chucking pieces of meat at me and telling me to stretch my mouth and catch them. She never fed me but twice. She said when she got Nick she would turn me loose.

"This morning before breakfast Jim Satan hit the shanty. After breakfast he came down into the cellar and took a look at me. My gag had been removed and I did some talking. So did Jim Satan. I was in the dark about many things and he put me wise. It was ducks for him to let me know how well the game against Nick and Gerald Laken was working. He said that Meg Alverson had got him out of the cell in the basement of Laken's house, and that Meg was now putting up a scheme that would land Nick inside of twenty-four hours. As he left me, he let drive the information that I was not even a gifted amateur in the sleuth line. I was—never mind what he said I was. Never mind what I shot back at him. He's dead now, and I didn't do any watery emotional business

when I saw what the old, no, the young German had done to him."

Patsy's story came to an end just as he and Chick were in sight of the gate of the Laken residence.

CHAPTER VI.

WITHIN AN INCH OF HIS LIFE.

Nick Carter showed surprise at the appearance of Patsy, but the feeling was not pronounced. He greeted the young detective warmly, and refused to hear what Patsy had to say for himself until after Mrs. Smithers' late prisoner had had something to eat.

The story of the capture, imprisonment and rescue deeply interested the great detective. His countenance wore a look of satisfaction when Patsy came to the end of his tale.

"I thought Shantytown might be worth a visit," he said, "and, therefore, I sent Osterhaus there and also told Chick to take in the place. I think we are near the wind-up. Osterhaus has done so well that I would not be surprised if he should come to us before night with the good news that he has located Mrs. Smithers. And that would mean the location of Meg Alverson as well."

"I suppose we must notify the coroner of the death of Jim Satan," remarked Chick.

"Yes. I'll phone the office at once."

This duty done, Nick said to Laken, who had sat in silence during the conversation: "If you will go over to New York within an hour, you can catch the afternoon train for the South."

The millionaire's face brightened instantly. He had been thinking of his wife and the detective's suggestion pleased him.

"You are a mind reader," he replied with a smile. "I am anxious to see my wife, to know that she is alive and in no danger, and you have told me how I can shorten the time of waiting. I will take that train and meet her at Richmond."

"Good," said Nick. "With you out of the way, I can work with more comfort. The enemy will have only me and my assistants to deal with."

"Do you want me to prepare a package to put in that tree before I leave?" asked the millionaire.

"No. The tree matter is off. It is Nick Carter and Company against the Smithers' Company, limited. At the present time you don't count."

"I am glad to hear it," responded Laken, with a sigh of relief, "and I hope I shall get back to find the birds caged."

"You'll find a change in the situation, be assured of that," said Nick, grimly.

The day wore on and Nick began to show signs of anxiety. Laken had gone and Fritz Osterhaus had not returned.

"I will give him until six o'clock," said the great detective to Chick and Patsy, "and then, if he is not here, we'll separate and try to do a little business ourselves."

But such alternative action was not required. At five o'clock Fritz Osterhaus, flushed and panting, walked up the avenue to the house. Nick was on the porch, and his face showed great relief when he saw the young German.

"Well?" he asked quickly, "have you made it?"

"Oof I hafen't, den you gan dake my het fon a vootpall," was the joyous answer. "I haf holed dose vicked beobles und you gan gollar dem venefer you vos veelin' lige gedding a mofe on, alretty."

Chick and Patsy, who had been strolling about the grounds, came up and the quartet adjourned to Laken's study. Nick had been placed in charge of the Laken establishment pending the return of the millionaire.

"Take your time," said Nick, pleasantly, as Osterhaus dropped into a chair and began to mop his perspiring face. "You have done wonders, and we are anxious to hear your story. But good things will keep, so we won't hurry you."

The young German laughed.

"Dose remargs oof yours dond jipe, Mr. Garder. You say, dond hurry and den you say you vos inxious. Vell, I vos reaty to sbeag. I vollered dot vicked voomans und I knows der grib vere she vos hiting. Und ven you gatch her you gatch dot Alverson voomans, doo."

"That's the kind of news I like to hear," said Nick, joyfully. "Where is the place and how did you manage to track Mrs. Smithers?"

"Py rickolookting vot you said apouid her peen a chew vonce. I vent in some drees by fer pay und dere I vound a galigo tress. I biged id up und id vos varm mit vearing a liddle vile ago, vot? I smells a mouses. Dod vicked voomans haf gone und digeesed herselluf. I gould see how she gould do dot. She had der desgees closes pehind her tress. She shets dot tress und vinds der vig und viskers in her bogets und dere she vos.

"'Vell,' says I to mineselluf, "dwo gan blay mit dot game, I dond dink. I peen an old Cherman. Now I pe mineselluff vonce more. So I dake avay dose cray peard und viskers und long-dailed goat und get quick avay vrom dere. Pooty soon I sbotted an old chew. I geep in der drack oof dot Chew und py und py, dwo dree, vour hours, I peen see her go indo a grib in Ni Yorruk in dot blace dey gall Coosedown py der Pronx. Der house is on a plock mit only dwo udder houses. One of de udder houses haf nicker mans in dere. De udder oof de udder houses geeps tagoes. Von mans dell me I petter loog ouid von dot tago blace. Dot Plack Hant sday dere."

Nick and Chick exchanged significant glances.

"We must raid that crib to-night," said Nick.

The young German clapped his hands. "Dot's der vay do dalk sinsibleness," he exclaimed. "Strike ven der iron geds blendy hodness. Oof you vaid undil do-morrow maype you vind dose beobles are nod dere some more."

"Are you sure Meg Alverson is there?" interrogated Nick.

"I vos. Ven I was hiting on der udder side oof dot shreed der young voomans vent in."

"Went in as a woman?" said Chick.

"Dot's vot she did. I vos knowed her py der discroobtion dot Mr. Garder haf gif me. Und dot Smithers voomans vos meed her py dot toor, alretty. I see dot, und den ven der young voomans vent indo der house I vent to der nicker blace mitoud ledding der vicked vuns know dot I vas apouid und asked a nicker poy who id vos dot lifed in dot house py der nexd toor. He said dot dwo actresses lifed dere. Somedimes dey vos disgeesed und somedimes dey vosn't disgeesed. Dey vos vimmens, he know dot, alretty, pecause he peen in der house vor some errants dey vanted."

"If they stay there to-night we'll get them," said Nick. "And now for our programme. I know that house. A few years ago it was occupied by a gang of counterfeiters. There is a cellar and an underground tunnel with the outlet in an old ice house in the back yard. One of us must enter the house by means of the tunnel."

"Let me be the man," spoke Chick, quickly.

Nick did not reply for several minutes. The matter required careful consideration. "Vy vouldn't I pe der vun?" said Osterhaus, an expression of joyous eagerness on his face.

"No, we want you in another place," returned the great detective. "Chick's offer is accepted. Patsy, you will take the back door. When you hear me call, break in the door. Take along some implement that will do for the breaking. Osterhaus, you will have the hardest part to play, for your duties must begin as soon as possible. I want you to go to the Bronx at once, find a hiding place near by, and watch the house until you see me. Give this kind of a whistle"—showing—"and I will come to you. If the report is that the women are inside the house I will proceed to do my part of the play."

"You vill coom in disgeese, von'd you?" inquired the young German.

"Of course, and my disguise will be that of a Chinaman. I will carry a Chinese lantern."

"Und you vill dry to go indo der house?"

"Yes; if the door does not open when I knock, I shall give Patsy his signal and then burst in the door. But in any event, whether the door is opened for me to enter or whether I break it in, you are to follow me. Inside we will find Patsy and Chick, for Chick will raise the trap when Patsy smashes in the door."

"I may find difficulty in raising the trap," said Chick. "It may be locked on the upper side."

"That is true, but you must take the chance of finding it unlocked. I think you will have no difficulty in reaching the room over the cellar. The trap has uses for such people as Mrs. Smithers and Meg Alverson. I don't believe the door is ever locked."

Fritz Osterhaus left the three detectives and hurried to the ferry. He was in high spirits which found partial vent in whistling.

Chick and Patsy crossed the river an hour after the departure of the young German.

Nick Carter waited until six o'clock and then ordered the millionaire's auto. The chauffeur was the under gardener who had innocently permitted the escape of Jim Satan.

The detective was whirled to Hunter's Point, and there alighted and dismissed the chauffeur.

It was dark when he got on board the ferryboat to go to Thirty-fourth street.

Halfway across the river, as he was standing by the low rail at the stern of the boat, a man rushed toward him; something struck the detective's head, and as his body relaxed it was lifted and flung into the water.

The murderous act was not observed, for at that time the other passengers were either in the main cabin or gathered at the forward part of the vessel.

No cry followed Nick Carter's plunge into the stream. The ferry slip was reached, and among the passengers who walked swiftly to the landing was the tall man who had apparently become an assassin.

He did not proceed toward the cars, but loitered in the vicinity.

Presently he became interested in the actions of a man who had not come by the boat, but who had been waiting at the slip, evidently on the lookout for an expected arrival from the other side of the river.

This man was Chick. When he found that Nick had not crossed from Hunter's Point, a chill of dire apprehension seized him. He looked about him, caught a glimpse of the head of a man whose form was concealed behind some packing cases, and his fear that Nick had been foully dealt with was augmented. He recognized the man behind the cases, although he had not seen him for years. He was an ex-prize fighter, named Redfield Rockwell, alias Red, the Rocky, and he had been sent to Sing Sing for garroting a wealthy resident of Brooklyn. Nick and Chick had procured the evidence that had brought about the garroter's conviction.

There were two things to be done and Chick, thinking quickly, resolved to do them, one after the other, and without protracted interval.

After giving vent to a sigh of disappointment, Chick moved in the direction of the elevated stairs.

Apparently without intention he passed close to the packing cases. Red, the Rocky's, head ducked as the detective started forward.

Chick turned like a flash as he came opposite the man in hiding, and was on the villain's back and using his fists with pile-driver effect before the victim realized what was happening to him.

A sixth sense, a feeling that he was doing the right thing, although practical evidence, as a warranty, was wanting, made Chick act as he did. He pummeled Red, the Rocky's, face and then stamped the writhing body

into inertness. The whole operation did not take two minutes.

Dragging the unconscious form of the assassin to the ferryboat, he called the captain, made his explanation and preferred a request. It was readily granted, as no more trips over the river would be made that night, an accident having happened to the machinery.

A small boat was lowered into the water, and after Red, the Rocky, securely bound, had been deposited, rather roughly, in it, Chick grasped the oars and rowed out upon the river.

The electric lights permitted him to see about him for quite a distance, and his heart beat rapidly when his eyes fell on the head of a man who was swimming slowly toward him.

The rowboat soon reached the swimmer, and Nick Carter, well-nigh exhausted, was hauled on board.

"I was betting you would come, Chick," the great detective gasped, "and it was well you did, for I don't believe I could have reached the shore. I received a clip on the head that took away two-thirds of my strength. But who have you got here?" noticing for the first time the now groaning prisoner. "Not the fellow who tried to murder me?"

"If he isn't the piker, I'll eat my hat," replied Chick. "Tell me what occurred on the boat, and we'll soon see what's what."

Nick told his story. "I must have been struck with a sandbag," he said in conclusion, "and if it had taken me fairly in the back of my head, I would be a dead one now. But it didn't. It caught me, glancingly, on the side, but there was force enough in the blow to temporarily deprive me of sense and strength."

"A bath was just what you needed, then," observed Chick.

"Nothing could have been better. The plunge under water cleared my brain and gave me sufficient strength to hold out until you arrived."

The boat was near the slip, and Nick just had time to hear Chick's story before the oars were shipped alongside of the larger craft.

"This stoppage is just the thing for us," said Nick, as he prepared to ascend the ladder. "The captain is a thoroughbred, and we can use the cabin for the transaction of our business."

The master of the ferryboat did more than this. He found dry clothing for Nick and also provided welcome refreshments.

It was eight o'clock when the two detectives and their prisoner found themselves sole occupants of the large cabin.

"We must get away by ten o'clock," said Nick. "Plenty of time, for the business here shouldn't take up more than an hour."

"What are youse marks goin' ter do wit me?" asked Red, the Rocky, who had been placed on a bench and sat facing the two detectives. "I ain't done nothin'."

Nick Carter was in a pleasant humor. His head did not bother him, thanks to a rugged constitution and the excellent treatment he had received, and his eyes had a satisfied expression in them as he fixed them on the battered visage of the ex-pugilist.

"In the first place," the detective replied, "we are going to search you."

The prisoner's jaw dropped. Nick's smile deepened.

"I have a hunch, Rocky," he said, "that you carry on your person the proof that you were hired to kill me. I have enemies who wish to put me out of the way, and they have arranged several methods of ridding the earth of my undesirable presence. If I am not mistaken, you were detailed to watch the Long Island railway route. Another of your stripe, or one of the principals, had the Astoria ferry detail. It was believed that I would cross to New York to-night, and it was also believed that I would take one of two routes. Am I not right?"

"Go chase yerself," was the surly response.

"I'll chase you a while first, Rocky. Chick, drag his pockets and see what comes of the operations."

The prisoner tried to bite Chick, but received such a slapping that he was glad to shut his mouth and remain passive during the searching process. Many articles were taken from the pockets, but only one interested Nick Carter. This was a note. The handwriting was Meg Alverson's, and the note read thus:

"Go to the Long Island R. R. depot at five o'clock. If he comes to cross to New York your chance will be on the boat. Report before midnight."

There was no signature. For Nick Carter's purpose none was needed. He placed the note in his pocketbook and then addressed Red, the Rocky, in a sharp, attention-compelling voice: "I've got you. I know who wrote that note. You attempted to do Meg Alverson's bidding. You failed. It's you for a lifer unless you say something to take the sting out of my feeling for you."

"Will you let up on me if I tell you what you'd give a tousan' simoleons ter know?"

"I will treat you better than you deserve," replied Nick, coldly. "But I will make no hard and fast promises."

"You don't have ter. I am onto your gait an' I'll help yer hand, hopin' ter cop enough sleepers ter put me on Easy Street. I am not doin' any romancin' about what happened on the boat, but 'll contribute the info that Meg Alverson can be found at midnight at the old Dempsey crib near Bronxville."

"You were to report there, were you?"

"Sure. I was ter get one hundred bones if my report suited the old dame."

"Mrs. Smithers?"

Red, the Rocky, nodded. "Know her, do yer?"

"I have heard of her. Where did you get acquainted with her?"

"In the Boston pen. I was doin' time for a purse-coppin' act, an' me'n an' she got acquainted. They put her in the kitchen an' I was a trusty."

"I suppose you found one subject upon which you could both freely converse."

The prisoner looked hard at Nick Carter. "What is catin' yer?" he asked.

"A reason for your gladly taking the job to do me. In jail in Boston you two discussed me, didn't you?"

The ex-pugilist batted his eyes and his lips moved, but no words were spoken.

"You hated me," Nick went on, "and so did Mrs. Smithers. You both planned to kill me, didn't you?"

Red, the Rocky, did not answer the question.

"Silence says, 'yes.' And when you met Mrs. Smithers in New York and she told you that I was interfering in a big money scheme she had hatched up, you didn't need much persuasion to enter her employ."

"I wish she was in the devil's clutches," viciously snapped the ex-pugilist. "If I hadn't met her, I might a let you slide. But you are goin' ter be easy wi' me, I know. Say, I'll put yer wise ter somethin'. Yer want ter watch out for Meg. Se's doin' some stunt on the quiet. I ain't on, but from some words the old dame let drop, I know that Meg's fixed to hand yer out somethin' hot when yer lamps are turned the other way."

"I am much obliged for your warning," replied the detective without exhibiting any uneasiness. "I know she's a smart one, and I realize that there is danger in the air."

"Meg don't like you for sour apples," said Red, the Rocky. "She told me once that you had a contempt for her style o' workin'. 'I'll show him,' she said, 'that he's made a big beefsteak. I got cold feet in Beantown in that Jocko Smithers' case, but I had a right to. Catch me bein' tied up ter a loonatick. Hereafter it's me to the brain factory.' Mrs. Smithers heard her an' let out the remark that she, the old dame, was runnin' that factory on full time. What do you think?" looking sharply at Nick.

"My thoughts are not for sale or to give away tonight," responded the detective. There was a pause. Chick nudged Nick. "Time to be doing something, old man."

"One more question and I am through with Red." Turning to the prisoner, he asked: "Do you know Jim Satan?"

"Of course. He's in the swim, knows everything the old dame knows."

"He's dead. One of my assistants killed him this forenoon."

"Then"—Red, the Rocky, stopped and looked queerly at Nick.

"Then what?" inquired the detective, sharply.

But the prisoner refused to say more.

At ten o'clock Nick and Chick left the boat. Red, the Rocky, was not released, but remained behind a prisoner. Nick had not made up his mind as to what disposition he should make of the ex-pugilist's case.

The prisoner was placed below deck and a couple of boat hands, for a consideration, agreed to act as guards.

Fritz Osterhaus had been informed that the raid on the crib, occupied by Mrs. Smithers and Meg Alverson, would be made about midnight. Nick knew he could reach the place before the midnight hour, and, therefore, he had time to readjust his plans for the campaign which promised interesting developments.

He would have been less easy in mind had he known that fifteen minutes after his departure from the ferryboat, Red, the Rocky, was at large with one thought animating his wicked brain, to get to the crib by the Bronx in time to notify Meg Alverson and Mrs. Smithers of the peril which menaced them.

If he could see Meg alone, it was his intention to advise her to drop Mrs. Smithers and try to make terms with Nick Carter.

The ex-pugilist had been placed below deck with the cords still about his wrists and ankles. The guards were above, in the gangway leading to the stairs. Apparently there was not the slightest chance for escape.

But the prisoner, when the guards came and took a look at him, became aware of something that was without the knowledge of the great detective.

One of the guards was an old pal, who had, after a term in prison, come to the conclusion to try for a while to walk in the straight and narrow path.

He saw Red, the Rocky, caught the wink that was given for his benefit, and stirred by the memory of old associations resolved to aid his former friend.

The opportunity came when the other guard, after searching in his pockets, said that he left his pipe in the engine room. He went to get the pipe, and while he was away Red, the Rocky, was released and told to hike.

The return of the second guard was not greeted with a statement of the prisoner's escape. Red, the Rocky's old friend, concluded to defer the announcement. The door of the place of detention was closed, and the other guard might suppose, until he himself discovered the truth, that the prisoner was inside.

At a quarter to twelve a stoutly built man, who walked with head erect, swinging arms and an air which seemed to say, "Get off the earth, I own it," went to the front door of the crib near Bronxville and gave a peculiar knock. A voice spoke inside and a response by the man outside was given. The door was then opened and the man entered.

The person who admitted the man was Mrs. Smithers. Her first words were: "Did you make it? Has he croaked?"

The answer caused the evil woman to turn pale. "I missed it. It run him in the river, but the mucker swam out. I'm bettin' he'll be here to-night."

Mrs. Smithers sat down in a chair. She breathed heavily.

"What yer 'fraid of?" harshly jeered the man. "Didn't you lay a trap for him here? What's the matter with goin' ahead with it?"

Mrs. Smithers arose to her feet. She had recovered

her composure. There was a look in her eyes that made the man grin. "I had forgotten?" she said. "Yes, a trap has been laid and if he comes, we'll get him."

At that moment Nick Carter was outside the house talking with Fritz Osterhaus.

CHAPTER VII.

A NIGHT OF SENSATIONS.

The young German, from his station behind a high board fence across the street from the Smithers' domicile, heard the signal whistle of Nick Carter, and peering out of a hole made by the removal of a loose board, saw a Chinaman carrying a Chinese lantern, standing still in the roadway.

A return whistle was given, and Nick, going quickly to the hole in the fence and crawling through, saw that Fritz Osterhaus was trembling and that his face was pale.

The fence enclosed a vacant lot, and, therefore, conversation could be carried on without fear of eavesdropping.

"What's the matter?" asked the detective. "Isn't everything all right?"

"I dink so," was the answer, and the voice was cheery enough, "but I peen here such a long dime alretty, dot I vos pegan to vear dot you god in some droubles und gouldn't maig der rivvle, aind id? Und pezides I been avraid dot der Alverson voomans vouldn't coom py dot grib. Soon afder I vos coom here I knew dot Mrs. Smithers vos dere, bud I dond see or hear noddings oof dot young vun undil dwo, dree minudes pefore I peen here you vistle."

"She has just gone into the house, then?"

"Yaw, id musd haf peen dot voomans, vor she vend to der toor, knokit lige she gif a signal und Mrs. Smithers coom und led her in mitouid guestion."

"Was she in her woman's dress, or did she come as a man?"

"Lige a man she coom. Id vos pooty tark over dere und I tond see her faces, alretty. Bud it haf to be dot Meg Alverson. Who else gould id pe, I vand to know, vot?"

"Yes, it must have been Meg," replied Nick Carter, in a tone of conviction. "She has been out spying, probably with Astoria as a base, and has come to her evil partner with the news that I have been taken care of."

"Vot you means?" inquired the young German, in great curiosity.

"I mean that an attempt was made to-night to put me out of commission. A thug, known as Red, the Rocky, tried to assassinate me on the ferryboat of the Long Island railway company. The dastardly job came within an ace of being successfully carried out."

Fritz Osterhaus shivered. "Py chiminy," he said, "ve are ub against some awful vicked beobles. I dond veel habby vonce more undil you ged der handkiffs on der dwo voomans. Maype Meg vosn't so pad as dot Mrs. Smithers. She vos der diffles own zister, I dond dink."

"Meg is just as bad and more to be feared," returned Nick, "for she is the worker, and knowing that Mrs. Smithers intends murder, Meg does nothing to prevent it. Worse still, she cheerfully assists."

"Yaw, dot's so, she peen der vorst oof der dwo. Vell, vot ve do? Und vere are Ghick und Batsy? Vun in der dunnel und de udder in der pack yard, I oxposes, aind id?"

"Yes. They are now waiting for me to move."

Something of moment was then going on within the house. It had not been entered on Nick Carter's programme, and the great detective, all unconscious of the important doings in the crib, walked across the street and ascended the few steps that led to the front door.

Red, the Rocky, took a prominent part in the movement inside.

The front room was dimly lighted, only one candle being in evidence, and Mrs. Smithers had just broken a long silence when a jarring sound from the kitchen was heard.

The evil woman started to her feet, every nerve tingling.

"That's one of 'em," she savagely whispered to her companion. "It's either Nick Carter or his assistant, Chick. I'll fix him, whoever he is."

Against the wall leaned an axe. Seizing it, she stepped toward the connecting door to have her arm grasped by the man.

"No, not you," he hissed. "I'm the one. I missed the mucker once. It is now my turn to make good."

Mrs. Smithers gave up the axe and walked back to her chair. She covered her face with her hands, but she did not cover her ears.

More sounds were heard. The trapdoor was pushed upward, a head appeared, although the woman did not see it, and then followed a crash and a muffled cry, both of which noises she did hear.

Mrs. Smithers found her way to the door. She was shaking like a leaf, but her evil heart was full of rejoicing.

Raising the candle she directed her gaze toward the trap.

It was still raised, but there was no one in the kitchen.

She heard blows given by some one in the cellar, and a minute later a welcome face appeared above the hole.

"Is he dead, Red?" she asked, huskily.

"Deader'n a rabbit," was the fiercely satisfied answer. "The first clip fetched him, but I handed him out a couple more for luck."

Mrs. Smithers in hysterical joy met the rascal as he stepped to the floor, and patted him on the back. "Good boy, good boy," she pantingly said. "You'll get all you want for this. But—who is he? Nick or Chick?"

"Chick. We'll get Nick later."

"Yes, yes, and I hope he will come soon."

The light of the candle showed that the assassin's face was covered with blood.

"You need a wash," Mrs. Smithers remarked. "Your face is a sight."

"Let the blood stay," replied the man, harshly. "When I have settled with Nick Carter, I will clean up an' do a song-and-dance."

He closed the trapdoor and, turning, was about to reënter the front room when there came a knock at the front door.

"That's Nick," whispered the woman. "Get your axe and give it to him when I open the door."

"An' have some one lamp the business from the street. Nay, nay! Is this rotten plan the trap you'd fixed?"

The knock was repeated.

"I had forgotten, I am rattled," said Mrs. Smithers, quickly. "I wanted to play with him and then send him down the trap in the kitchen. I know what to do. He'll be in disguise, and I'll let him in and pretend not to know who he is."

She went to the door, called out, "Who's there?" and receiving the answer, "A friend from Boston," opened the door a little way, saw a Chinaman and civilly bade him enter.

Following Nick Carter came Fritz Osterhaus.

Mrs. Smithers snorted. "Two of you, are they? What does this mean?"

Red, the Rocky, was not in the room. He had retired to the kitchen.

Partly closing the connecting door, he lifted the trap and then stood behind the door and waited for the next move in the game. There was a curious smile on his blood-marked face.

Nick Carter saw that there were three chairs in the room.

Taking one which placed him near the street door, he waited until Mrs. Smithers and the young German had found seats and then opened his batteries.

He faced Mrs. Smithers, who sat in the middle of the room and a few feet from Fritz Osterhaus, whose position was close to the partition door.

"I am no Chinaman," the detective coolly began. "I am——"

"Nick Carter, I know it," interrupted the evil woman, with smiling composure.

The great detective's countenance did not change at this statement. He looked steadily at the woman and went on: "There appears to be, on your part, a misunderstanding of the situation here to-night. From the tone of your speech I judge that you are not aware that I hold the winning cards."

Mrs. Smithers said nothing in reply. Her hard face wore an aggravating smile.

"You have something up your sleeve, have you? Well, produce it."

"Not yet," she said, quietly. "Time enough. I wish to say something to you before letting you know what my position is. You owe me your life, because you were the cause of the death of my brother, Jocko. You hounded him to his grave. He was a poor, insane creature, and you run him down and arrested him for murder. He was not responsible, and when he died I swore I would have your life. I am not your enemy because you had me jailed. That was a small matter. I am your enemy because you killed my brother, and—and——"

"Because I have interfered in your scheme to further loot the money chest of Gerald Laken," interrupted the detective.

"Yes, that affair is the other count against you. And—I have you, have you where I want you. You sneer. Keep it up. It may amuse you and it doesn't annoy me. You won't sneer when you find out just how you stand."

"I suppose you are waiting for Meg Alverson before shooting off your skyrockets," said Nick, calmly.

"I may be and I may not be. Meg will give a good account of herself when the time comes for me to act."

"Possibly Chick or Patsy may prevent the appearance of your charming confederate."

Mrs. Smithers shrugged her shoulders, contemptuously. "They will be taken care of," she replied. "To be plain, I think Chick has already met with an accident."

The great detective's face paled slightly. Fritz Osterhaus watching him, spoke quickly. "I dond believe dot voomans. She vos hanting you ouid some oof dot hot airness. Ghick is der poy to loog ouid mit himselluf, efery tay in der veek, I pade you. Dot voomans petter skittoo mit her dwendy dree, I dond dink."

A noise in the kitchen restored the color to Nick's face. The noise also had the effect of stiffening the back of Mrs. Smithers.

She rapped on the wall and a voice called out from the kitchen, "I've got the other one."

"Patsy?" was the joyful question.

"Yes."

Mrs. Smithers faced the great detective. Her eyes were gleaming fiercely and her fingers were twitching excitedly.

"The game is made," she cried shrilly. "Mr. Nicholas Carter, you are it."

The detective's pistol hand went up. Fritz Osterhause arose to his feet. In each hand was a revolver.

Mrs. Smithers laughed until the tears ran down her face.

The laughter caused the appearance on the scene of the wicked woman's male confederate.

He stood in the doorway between the two rooms, holding by the collar the limp form of Patsy.

The young detective's hands were bound, and there was a sheepish look on his face.

The young German did not raise the hands which held the pistols until his eyes fell on the face of Patsy's captor. Then the muzzles of the weapons were directed toward the head of Mrs. Smithers, who, seeking in her

pocket for a pistol, had failed to find it where she had that evening placed it.

"I vill addend to der olt voomans," said Osterhaus to Nick. "You maig a zive oof dot pig sdiff in der toorvay."

The detective looked surprised, but he did follow the advice of the speaker. No shots were fired.

The situation was a most peculiar one.

Patsy's captor had an axe in one hand, but instead of advancing, he looked to Mrs. Smithers for instructions. That wicked woman's countenance was convulsed with fear and rage. While she was struggling to speak, Nick Carter said, quietly:

"Something of a farce, isn't it? No one seems inclined to make a move. Has there been any hitch in your programme, Mrs. Smithers?"

"Some one stole my pistol," was all the answer he received.

"That's bad," replied Nick, in mock consolation. "Thieves about. Better call up the police and have the matter looked into."

Fritz Osterhaus' back was toward the detective as he spoke to give the finishing touch to Nick's sarcastic play.

"I peen dinkin' dot ve mighd as vell haf some plint mans puff, or dot came dey gall, 'putton, putton, who haf god avay mit dor putton.' Oof dere aind to pe noddings doin' bud haf some vuns, leds go ahet und haf a tance or somdings, vot?"

Nick Carter did not smile at these words. His face wore a grave expression as he addressed Mrs. Smithers.

"You have lost. When I came in I said that I held the winning cards. I knew what I was talking about. You haven't a chance against me. To be plain, you are without a single means of defense. You are surrounded on all sides. To-night your bed will be in jail."

The woman said nothing in reply. Her head was not bowed in terror. It was held erect and the greenish eyes were fixed on the slightly smiling countenance of Fritz Osterhaus.

"Patsy, come here!" spoke the great detective, authoritatively. The cords dropped from the young assistant's wrists, and Patsy, head up, marched to the side of Nick Carter.

"Chick, it's your turn, now." And as the words were spoken, Mrs. Smithers, to her horror, saw the man she had taken for Red, the Rocky, leave his post in the doorway, drop the axe and come forward and place himself by the side of Patsy.

"Who—who was it—that—that camp up the trap?" This question fell in a hoarse whisper from the shaking woman's lips.

"Red, the Rocky," answered Chick in his natural voice. "We were not looking for him, for we left him tied up on a ferryboat, but it appears that he escaped and entering the tunnel—I suppose he figured that Nick had the front of the house guarded—got what you had planned to come to me."

"Is he dead?"

"No, I gave him a playful tap with the axe, just hard enough to provide the blood which you see on my face and then I went down the stairs, gave the floor a few thumps with the axe and afterward tied up my victim. Leaving Patsy—he followed Red into the cellar—to guard the fellow, I returned to you, Mrs. Smithers, and while you were patting me on the back for having done something that I had not done, I swiped your revolver."

"Curse you!" the defeated plotter hissed. "I hate you as much as I hate Nick Carter."

The great detective's face wore a placid expression. "You are not likely to harm either of us," he said easily. "Your curses may rest where all others you have uttered are resting—on the roost."

Mrs. Smithers scowled and bit her lip.

"As time is of no particular consequence just now," continued Nick Carter, "I will explain how it happens that you are in the soup. You placed too much reliance on the astuteness and energy of Meg Alverson. You looked upon her as the superior of any detective in the United States. Meg has not made good. She should be here. Where is she?"

"Don't worry your head about Meg," snapped Mrs. Smithers. "She will be in evidence when you least expect it."

The detective shook his head. "An error on your part. Meg has jumped the game."

"Flew der goops," added Osterhaus.

"She has taken counsel with herself and has made up her mind to act as she acted in Boston. What would you say if I told you that at this minute she is downtown in the Inspector's office giving you away?"

"I would say that you are a liar," was the quick, positive reply.

Nick Carter smiled broadly. "You must know more about her than I do, then."

"I know this," the woman said curtly, "that Meg will never go back on me. Just put that in your pipe and smoke it. You think you have me. Let me tell you that there is another act to this play. I'll confess that things have not happened exactly as I had planned, but all the same, if I don't spoil your game to-night, I'll miss my guess." She tried to talk further but her voice grew hoarse, and she was seized with a fit of coughing. During the paroxysm she managed to gasp, "water! get me some water!"

No one moved, though Fritz Osterhaus looked inquiringly at Nick.

"You'll have to get along without a drink," said the great detective, unfeelingly. "You want to get one of us out of the room. The scheme won't work."

The coughing suddenly ceased. Mrs. Smithers glared balefully at Nick, who smiled and then spoke sharply to Osterhaus: "Fritz, it's time to amend this entertainment. Keep her well covered while Chick and Patsy are at work with the handcuffs."

The moment the words were said, the young German sprang to the side of Mrs. Smithers, gave her one

of his pistols, and then as quick as a flash murderous fingers pressed two triggers.

But no reports followed. Snap! snap! snap! and then wild exclamations, abject despair.

Nick Carter regarded the spectacle with sparkling eyes. In his heart rested deep contentment.

"Why, what does this mean?" ejaculated Patsy, his eyes sticking out like saucers.

"It means," said Nick, quietly, "that we have bagged both birds. Fritz Osterhaus is Meg Alverson."

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW NICK CARTER WON OUT.

When the clever, but evil-minded young woman who had masqueraded as Fritz Osterhaus at last realized that the pistols used by herself and Mrs. Smithers had been "fixed," overmastering rage took possession of her. Regardless of consequences, she flung her revolver at the head of the man who had outwitted her.

Nick Carter's quick eye caught the movement just in time to save his face from damage, and ducking his head he allowed the weapon to strike the wall behind him.

A resort to stern force now became necessary, and the two women were treated as they deserved to be treated. In spite of their struggles—and they viciously attempted to use their nails and teeth—they were speedily subdued. After they had been handcuffed, the great detective turned to Patsy.

"I kept this revelation from you," he said, "because I wanted to give you a surprise. You have often stated that you reveled in dramatic situations spiced with surprises. So I handed you out one."

"I'm satisfied, Nick. But, gee! this is a corker. And you were onto the dame all the time, were you?"

"All the time, Patsy. She never fooled me for a minute. I gave her those pistols, but before I did so I saw that they were properly doctored. I believed that she would try to use them if Mrs. Smithers' little game failed to work."

The statement that she had never once deceived Nick Carter made the false Fritz Osterhaus choke with bitter wrath. Her chin dropped. The most maddening thoughts coursed through her brain, scorching it with images they conveyed.

"Fool, fool," she muttered under her breath, "double-dyed fool to have imagined that I could successfully pit myself against this man. I had a chance to-night to save my distance, but I did not take it." She raised her head and glared, not at Nick Carter, but at Mrs. Smithers. "You—you," she hissed, "have brought me to this. You flattered my vanity, swore that I was cleverer than the smartest detective in New York, and I swallowed your words and did your bidding. Oh, I wish I were free that I might kill you."

"It's hard lines, Meg," said Nick, before Mrs. Smithers could make suitable reply to her disgruntled associate in crime, "but you have no one but yourself to blame. I gave you good advice in Boston. You did not see fit to take it, and here you are."

A deep sigh was the response.

The detective waited a moment and then continued: "You are perhaps curious to know something about my under the surface operations. The story is an interesting one. When you made your grand-stand play in the Water Street joint—coming in while I was trying to wriggle out of a tight place and standing off a mob of toughs with your revolver—I knew you for Meg Alverson. The statement surprises you, does it? And yet there was nothing wonderful about the matter of my recognition. Your figure and your mannerisms betrayed you. You have a peculiarly shaped back. I had noted that back in Boston. In the Water Street joint you turned it toward me when you faced the mob. At the same time I noticed another peculiarity of yours—the way you carry your head at times. A sort of a sidewise toss, a little different from the ordinary exhibition we see every day on the Bowery."

"Anything else?" asked Meg Alverson, sourly.

"Yes. You made two movements, one with your shoulders, the other with your chin. Meg Alverson, in Boston, had a patent on these movements. You may not be aware of the fact that you make them every day of your life. But you do, and disguise yourself how you will, you cannot hoodwink the expert in sign reading. I have made a study of this branch of my profession."

Meg Alverson gulped down a retort, and then turned her back on the detective.

Nick Carter coolly proceeded with his explanation. "While I was trying to account for the enemy's appearance in the rôle of a friend, the squad of police I had phoned for, rushed into the barroom. Then I caught onto Meg's little game. She had been doing sentinel duty outside the joint, and had seen the officers hurrying toward her. At once she realized that the scheme to do me that night was doomed to failure. An opportunity to get in some slick work and pave the way for another and a successful attempt on my life was presented, and she immediately took advantage of it. Am I right, Meg?"

"Go ahead, it's your play," was the surly answer.

"Then I must conclude that I correctly sized up

the situation. And then I found myself in a predicament. I could have arrested you, Meg, that night, but there was Patsy to consider. He was in the power of Mrs. Smithers, and your arrest then might not only mean the death of Patsy, but the escape from New York of the woman who was wanted for the attempt on my life as well as for the blackmailing and confidence operations directed against Gerald Laken, the Long Island millionaire. Thorough consideration of the matter convinced me that by watching you, Meg, I could not only get Patsy out of a hole, but also that I could gather in the whole force of the enemy. Do you see? Thereafter, while you thought you were playing with me, I was playing with you. And it was a pretty game most of the time. There were one or two moves that surprised but did not disconcert me. You made one, Meg, when you killed Jim Satan and released Patsy."

"I wish now that I had served him as I served Satan," wrathfully exclaimed the woman addressed.

"No, you don't," said Nick, "for that break would have caused your instant arrest, and you would have placed your pretty neck in jeopardy. I can guess why you shot Jim Satan, and why you restored Patsy to me. Satan had done all he could do, and he was a dangerous man to handle. He knew too much. You appreciated the danger you were in when you found him a prisoner in Laken's house, and so you fooled the under-gardener and released the villain. It is a wonder to me that you did not kill Satan instead of turning him loose."

"I didn't think of it in time," she replied. She paused a moment, and then continued: "I am glad I didn't kill him then, for you would have called that murder. As it is, you can't make a murder case against me. I killed the man to save your assistant."

"Have it so," returned the detective. "I am not making any point of the Satan matter. Now as to Patsy. You set him free and that, to your mind, was the slickest play you had made since you had assumed the part of Fritz Osterhaus. You cared nothing for Patsy, and you imagined that by appearing before me as his rescuer you would so strengthen your position as my ally that it would be unassailable.

"Yes, it was a good play," continued Nick, "and would have counted if I had not then known you in your true character. I suppose you thought when you left Patsy and went off to pursue Mrs. Smithers, that the report you should afterward make to me would be instantly accepted as the truth."

"Oh, if I had only known," said the woman fiercely, "I would have trapped you in spite of your reputation for sagacity. And you did come near bidding good-by to this world. If Red, the Rocky, had struck you as he ought to have struck, the game would have been ours."

"Yes, that side move of Mrs. Smithers was a surprise. I suppose she wanted to make sure that I would be out of the way to-night, and, therefore, hired Red to waylay me. But my luck stayed with me, and the end I sought was reached despite the surprises.

"Of course you know, Meg, that the programme for the raid here was not given to you as it was carried out. The only part that was not changed without your knowledge was my own. I appeared to you, as I had promised, as the Chinaman. You were agitated when you saw me on the street, for you had hoped that Red, the Rocky's, murderous plot had succeeded. I will say that you gave very plausible explanation of your nervousness, for you are an actress of fair abilities. But you are not a star. Far from it. A star would have done better with the rôle of the young German. You overdid it, Meg. You were too flip at times, too stagy. The dialect guff you handed out to me smacked of cheap vaudeville."

"Oh, shut up," said the young woman harshly. "You make me fatigued."

"I have but little more to say," Nick went on serenely. "I might have clapped the handcuffs on you when I met you to-night by the fence across the street, but I concluded to play with you a little longer. Besides I had promised myself a little entertainment in this crib, and it seemed a pity to cut it out. I believed I had the game in my own hands. Chick had had a part to play, and I felt convinced that he had played it without having made a mistake, and, therefore, when I entered the room I expected to find, and did find, that all had gone well. As for Patsy, he had carried out the instructions that I had given him, and a few more besides."

Meg Alverson had now, in a measure, recovered her composure. She was making the best of a bad situation. She was looking ahead. She saw herself on the witness stand testifying for the prosecution and drawing the net tighter about Mrs. Smithers. "If I do this," she said to herself, "the prosecuting attorney will make it light for me."

Her change of feeling chased the cloud from her face. She began to take a cooler interest in Nick Carter's story.

The detective was regarding her curiously when she said in an even tone: "I'll bet you don't know just how I acted when I met Mrs. Smithers at the door of the shanty near Little Neck Bay."

"No, I don't know. How could I? But I am a pretty good guesser. Your actions were governed by the knowledge that Chick was not far away."

"You are right. He was on the train that brought me to Bayside. He did not mean that I should see him, but I did."

"That was all right," said Nick sweetly. "And now I will make another guess. You expected Chick to show up at the shanty quicker than he did. Therefore, you had to act rapidly. You gave Mrs. Smithers the signal of danger when she opened the door, and, as she proceeded to act upon it, you turned your attention to Jim Satan, who did not recognize you in your old-man make-up, and to whom you gave no signal. That's about how it was, wasn't it?"

"Exactly," looking at him with admiring eyes. Then she frowned. "I have no reason to like you," she added, "and yet——"

"Cut it out," broke in Patsy. "Come to business."

Meg Alverson shrugged her shoulders. "Cut it out goes," she replied. She looked at the floor a moment, then raising her head again addressed Nick Carter.

"I wish to ask you a question," she said. "When you told Chick to shadow me to Shantytown why did you not direct him to follow me to the end of my journey?"

"Because," returned Nick, "that would have spoiled the plan which has resulted in your undoing. You would have known it. Besides, it was not necessary that Chick should follow after he had seen Jim Satan dead and had met Patsy. Chick knew you for Meg Alverson, and he believed that, unhampered, you would play into my hands. I was not at all surprised when you returned with the information that you had holed Mrs. Smithers. Any more questions?"

"One more. If you knew me when I was at the Laken residence why did you not have me watched? If you had done so, I could not have released Jim Satan."

"I thought I had provided against a rescue, and, therefore, I did not have you watched. Call it a mistake on my part if you will, but events have shown that the mistake, if mistake it was, did not injure my case."

The story of Nick Carter's successful move was told. Mrs. Smithers groaned. "I wish, now," she said, "that I had let up on you until I had finished with Laken. I had that job in fine shape. To-morrow brings Mrs. Laken, and I had it all fixed to abduct her."

"She will not arrive to-morrow," responded Nick quietly. "Your plot was foreseen when Meg, as Fritz Osterhaus, advised Laken to wire his wife to come home and I took measures to spoil it. Meg thought that a telegram was sent from the house urgently requesting Mrs. Laken to start for home at once. Such a telegram was written and shown to Meg, but it was never sent. I prepared another while Meg was away, and it went over the wires. It requested Mrs. Laken to stop at Richmond and wait for her husband. Mr. Laken will meet her there, and there the two will remain until a wire from me tells them to come on."

"Beaten at every turn," the despairing wretch muttered. "I am down and out."

That night Mrs. Smithers, Meg Alverson, and Red, the Rocky, were conveyed to the nearest police station.

In the morning Mrs. Smithers was found dead in her cell. She had taken poison for the purpose of ending her miserable life. Her person had been searched by the matron when she arrived at the station, but the poison had been so cunningly secreted that it was not found.

Red, the Rocky, did not live to be tried for his attempt on Nick Carter's life. Chick's clip with the axe was more severe than had been intended, and the ex-pugilist, attacked by brain fever, ended his evil career in jail. He was conscious before he died and admitted that he had got what he deserved.

Meg Alverson was prosecuted for obtaining money and goods under false pretenses. There were several complaints, and she is now in prison serving a twenty-year sentence.

Through the efforts of Nick Carter and his clever assistants all the jewelry stolen by Meg Alverson was recovered.

Gerald Laken overwhelmed the great detective with enthusiastic compliments for the services Nick had rendered.

"This experience has cured me," he said, with a positiveness that was meant to impress but did not. "Hereafter Gerald Laken is no Easy Mark."

"Not if I know it," rejoined Mrs. Laken, with a tightening of her lips.

This statement *did* make an impression.

THE END.

The next number, 646, will contain "Three Times Stolen; or, Nick Carter's Strange Clue."

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A MAN WHOM NO PRISON, FETTERS, OR STRAIT-JACKET CAN HOLD.

"How do I free myself from fetters and handcuffs, break out of triple-locked cells in which I have been placed naked, and wriggle out of the strongest strait-jacket yet invented? Now, surely, you don't expect me to give all that away?" And Harry Houdini, "King of Escapers," laughed heartily as he produced cigarettes in his dressing room at a London theatre recently.

"Still," continued Mr. Houdini, "I will tell you this secret. My feats are accomplished by adaptability of the muscular system; in other words, by a combination of squirming, dislocation of the joints, and strength. I have so trained my muscles that I can expand or contract them to an extent little dreamed of by the public. In addition, I have a knowledge of locks and bolts equaled by that only of the most expert locksmiths. As a matter of fact, in my youth I was apprenticed to a locksmith, and a taste for mechanics and mechanism led me to discover secrets which enable me to free myself from any lock or bolt.

"I may also tell you this: that the talk about psychic power and magic is all nonsense. A thorough knowledge of my own body and the intricacies of possibly every lock and bolt that has yet been invented are the means whereby I release myself from the strongest of fetters."

It is scarcely surprising, however, that those people who see his latest feat are almost led to believe that Mr. Houdini is aided by some supernatural power. A galvanized iron can, closely resembling a milk churn, is brought on to the stage. It is guaranteed water-tight and air-tight, and is submitted to an examination of a jury from the audience, who satisfy themselves that it has no false bottom or removable neck. Water is then poured into the can until it flows over the brim, and Houdini, in bathing costume, then gets inside the churn, the amount of his displacement being seen by the water which gushes out on to the stage.

The jury then take a last peep at him, to assure themselves that he is fully immersed, and then the top of the churn is clapped on and securely fastened with six padlocks. The curtains are drawn, and after the space of a minute or so, during which time an anxious assistant stands by with an axe in one hand and a watch in the other, ready to cleave the churn if anything should go wrong, the curtains are withdrawn, and Houdini is shown, wet and breathless, standing by the side of the churn, which is still padlocked. The water is also still there, and the locks just as the jury left them. To say that the audience is staggered is to put the matter mildly.

Commenting on this trick, which has taken him years to perfect, Mr. Houdini says that he must hold his breath for between two and three minutes. Otherwise he would drown.

"Training myself to hold my breath for such a period," he continued, "was one of the most difficult parts of the feat. In order to test myself I once held my breath for three minutes forty-five seconds. Consequently I am pretty sure of coming out of the churn all right every time, unless something else goes wrong; in which case I should have to depend upon the promptitude of my assistant for getting me out alive."

Houdini precedes this feat by showing how easy it is to get out of a strait-jacket so tightly buckled that it appears almost impossible for him to move half an inch; and yet in a few minutes he is free.

"The first time I tried that trick," he said, "it took me an hour and a half to get free. And I have heard that the asylum people, when they are obliged to place a strong man in a strait-jacket, now grease the floor, so that he cannot get a 'purchase' with his feet, so fearful are they that, if a man like myself can escape, others may do likewise. But I think they underestimate the strength of their jackets.

"They seem determined to beat me, however, and the other night some asylum attendants brought what they call a 'crazy crib,' a bed on which dangerous lunatics are strapped down. I had a rare tussle after they had trussed me up, and it was only after twenty-five minutes' work, by which time my dress suit was in ribbons, that I got free."

Remembering that Mr. Houdini first gained a reputation as a man whom no handcuffs could hold, the newspaper man asked him if he had now discontinued his handcuff tricks.

"Yes," he replied. "There are so many poor imitators that, although I was the originator of the business, I am now rather ashamed of billing myself as a handcuff expert.

"In Berlin, in September last, however, I performed a feat which may interest you. I was fettered with locked chains bound over my neck, arms, and wrists, the latter being padlocked behind my back. I had previously donned a bathing costume in the presence of medical and police experts, and was then driven in a cab to the bridge over the Spree. I got on the parapet and threw myself in the water fifty feet below, and in thirty seconds was holding aloft the fetters with which I had previously been bound. I have also performed this feat in America, and once had a narrow escape of cracking my skull by coming up underneath a boat."

The prison cell has not yet been invented which would hold Houdini, and the police to this day are as much mystified as the public regarding the manner in which he escaped from the triple-locked cell in Sheffield—which once held Charles Peace, the murderer—after he had been stripped, in order that there should be no tools concealed about him. Afterward he entered another triple-locked cell, where his clothes were immured, dressed himself, and strolled through an iron gate fastened by a seven-lever lock, just as though there was nothing in his way.

On one occasion, however, Houdini thought he was beaten. It was at Burnley that he was locked in a cell with a solid iron door. For five hours he tugged away, trying to throw the bolt back, but unlock it would not. He felt sure that his Waterloo had come, and exhausted and in desperation he relaxed all his muscles and just fell against the door. It opened. No one was quite so amazed as Houdini, who, on examining the lock, discovered that it had not been locked at all. The keeper had banged the door, turned the key in the lock, and in taking it out had accidentally thrown the lock back. Of course, Houdini could not throw it back because it was already back.

"We laughed over the incident afterward," said Mr. Houdini, "but it was no laughing matter for me when I found that I could not get out."

Apart from his amazing feats with prison bars and bolts, however, Mr. Houdini is a remarkable man in many other respects. His versatility is astonishing. He has done almost everything in the show business, from operating a Punch and Judy show to walking a tight rope. Then he ventured forth as a magician, and has yet to meet the man who can beat him as a card manipulator. He has written a standard work on the subject of magic, his collection of portraits, posters, and programmes of magicians of the past being unique.

HOW TO MAKE A SIMPLE TENT.

Every boy likes to have a tent, and a good one can be made at very little expense; the stormy afternoons and long evenings of the winter will be excellent times in which to construct it. You can make either a wall-tent or an A, or wedge-tent, whichever you prefer.

First make up your mind which would best serve your purpose, and about what size you want your tent to be. Then calculate how much canvas it would take.

This calculation may be done either by arithmetic or by chalking out on a pavement, or representing with a string on the floor the lines of the tent that are necessary for your measurements. For instance, to find by arithmetic the amount of canvas necessary for a wedge-tent, square the number representing the required height of the tent; square also the number representing one-half of the required width of the tent; add these two results, and find the square root of the whole; the final result will give you the measurement of the slanting line from the top of one of the upright poles to the ground. Twice this measurement, besides about four inches more for the hems and two or three inches to spare for the rounding of the canvas over the top pole, will give the length of one of the long strips of canvas. To find out how many of these strips you will want is easily done by dividing the required length of your tent from front to back by the width of the canvas, which for this purpose may be considered to be twenty-eight inches—its real width is twenty-nine inches, but one inch must be allowed for the seam. The amount of canvas necessary for the front and back of the tent is not so easily determined, but it may readily be figured out closely enough for you to make a good estimate of how much canvas will be required altogether, remembering that where the door is to be the canvas should lap over.

But the other method of calculation is probably much the more simple one of the two, especially for tents that have walls. When you have chalked out a line to show the required height of the tent, one for the length of it, two for the roof, and one for the wall—if there is to be a wall—your calculations may be all readily made with a tape measure, remembering, as before, to allow about two inches for each hem and a few inches to spare, some of which may be taken up in the stitching.

Now for the sewing. This will have to be done by machine unless you have an unlimited amount of time, or a lot of friends to help you. The seams should be double seams, and are made by lapping the edges of canvas over each other about an inch, or as far as the margin marked on the canvas by a blue line, and stitching on each edge of cloth, making two rows of stitching to each seam.

The only difficulty in cutting the canvas is to cut the slanting lines of the back and front widths at the proper angle. This may perhaps be most easily done by laying the canvas down on a plan of the end of your tent chalked on the floor according to required measurements, and cutting according to the chalked lines.

When the tent is all put together, holes should be made in the lower hem, in pairs, and fitted out with brass rings, and through each pair of rings a bit of rope should be passed and knotted at both ends to form a loop. These loops are to be caught down by tent-pegs to hold the tent in position.

In deciding what size you would like your tent to be it would be well to take into consideration the width of the canvas; for instance, in a tent 7×7, which is a common size for a small tent, the width of the canvas goes an exact number of times into the length and width of the tent.

A tent with walls requires two rows of tent-pegs. The height of the wall should be about three feet and the height of a tent 7×7 about seven feet. The canvas comes in two weights. The lighter weight is about fifteen cents a yard, and the heavier about twenty cents.

THE TRUTH ABOUT SNAKE-CHARMING.

It may be stated positively that snakes said to be charmed are not drugged nor electrified. Neither are they hypnotized, for no human being ever yet existed able to hypnotize or mesmerize a snake of any species whatsoever, or to affect it in any way by what the gullible public is pleased to call the "power of the human eye."

Neither are their fangs cut out, for the snakes used are nearly always of a harmless species, and have no more venomous power than a rat or a pigeon. They are, for the most part, boas—boa-constrictors—from South America, of all snakes the most gentle and tractable in disposition. Any one can take up a boa, provided he acts gently and with a slight knowledge of the animal's likes and dislikes.

There are things, however, which the boa will fiercely resent, and these the charmer knows and carefully avoids. For instance, should any one annoy a boa-constrictor by puffing his breath strongly three or four times into the reptile's face, it will become so fierce that the charmer must put it away or suffer the consequences of a fierce paroxysm of hissing and biting rage, and a large boa's bite is not to be thought lightly of, for he has six rows of teeth, four in the upper jaw and two in the lower, all half an inch long, and as fine as needles.

The whole explanation of this "snake-handling," which, by courtesy, is called "charming," is this—the charmer doesn't hurt the snakes. He doesn't frighten them. He does none of the things which he knows will anger them. Under such treatment all animals are docile.

The groom cannot do altogether as he likes with his horses, for there are actions which no horse will permit. Animals, when treated according to their nature, are tractable, and, when contrary to it, are rebellious, and snakes are no exception.

Some one may here ask, why do not large boas wrap themselves around the charmer and do a little strangling? The answer is, that they do not press the "charmer" because the "charmer" does not hold them tightly.

If held forcibly by the neck, the giant serpent will soon exhibit his constricting powers, and, by enwrapping himself around the neck and arms and body, will gradually tighten his coils until the grasp on his neck is released, when he will proceed to uncoil himself, after giving a fearful bite to the hand which had rudely detained him.

It may be stated for a certainty that no snake uses his constricting power in attack except in the act of taking his prey, and never in defense, except when held as prisoner.

Many persons imagine that deadly snakes have a special mission to use their venom on human beings, and that they are ever ready and anxious to do so. So far is this from being the case that it might be stated, as a rule, that, except when much provoked, they are very slow and reluctant to bite. The accomplished charmer always chooses quiet snakes, and, by handling them gently, escapes the danger to which he would be exposed with those of a more nervous disposition.

SIBERIA HAS GREAT FUTURE.

The vast area of Siberia is as yet scarcely touched commercially, when we consider the richness and capability of production of its soil and its constantly growing population.

In 1900, it was estimated that out of a total of 19,727,000 acres of cultivated land, 11,625,000 acres were under crops in Siberia. Crops greatly fluctuate in Siberia; the yield in a good year is two or three times that of a bad one.

Siberia's exports of dairy products are rapidly increasing and have a most promising future. In 1898, 4,000 buckets of butter, each containing thirty-six pounds, were sent as an experiment to the London market; 30,000 buckets of butter a week were sent thither in 1901. The pasturage in this butter-producing region, which lies chiefly in the district of Tomsk, is so good that there is 7 per cent. of butter-fat in the milk.

In 1902, a Danish firm was the first to export salted beef, mutton, and pork from Siberia to London. Its success showed that Siberian mutton was good enough to compete with the best Icelandic mutton, and may in future become an important factor in the meat markets of western Europe.

In 1902, the first canning establishment in Asiatic Russia was opened at Omsk. Exports of hides and skins from Siberia increased from 2,800 tons, in 1899, to 5,200 tons, in 1902. More than 1,600 tons of Siberian eggs are exported annually, many of them finding their way to the London market.

The fisheries of Siberia are very important. The River Amur is especially rich in salmon. The amount of preserved fish exported from Siberia grew from 640 tons, in 1899, to 2,000 tons in 1902. The high price of salt and tin plate and the lack of skilled knowledge are retarding the Siberian canned-fish industry.

The vast coniferous forest zone of Siberia is yielding ever-increasing quantities of timber. On January 1, 1906, the state forests of Russia in Asia covered 650,687,497 acres. The timber industry has scarcely begun to be developed in Siberia.

Mining has the greatest future of any Siberian industry. Gold in placers is the chief mineral product at present. No statistics as to the amount of gold produced in Siberia can be obtained, as the figures are contained in the total output of the Russian Empire.

The average annual production of pig iron in the Ural and Siberia—separate statistics for Siberia not given—from 1902 to 1906, inclusive, was 657,440 tons. The Siberian output of coal, chiefly from the province of Akmolinsk, rose from 660,770 tons, in 1902, to 1,323,400 tons in 1905. Copper is mined in small quantities. More and more foreign capital is becoming interested in the mineral wealth of Siberia, and American miners are prospecting in those parts of the Primorskaya, opposite and near Alaska.

IMPUDENCE IN RASCALS.

The modern Bill Sikes, across the water, is no respecter of persons. Only the other day, a constable's house, at Dalston, in England, was broken into, and a quantity of clothing taken. By way of adding insult to injury, the very next day, either the same man, or another of the fraternity, turned his attention to the Commercial Street Police Station.

A little after six in the evening, the constable at the door happened to be called away for a moment. In walked the thief, and helped himself to a cap, overcoat, and mackintosh, and got off with them in safety.

There is a class of thief whose motto seems to be: "Fortune favors the brave."

At Wrexham, a man was sentenced to three years for cattle-stealing. His method was simplicity itself. Observing a number of cattle in a field, he walked in, drove them off to the nearest market, and disposed of them in the ordinary way.

That a London post-office should be raided in broad daylight seems a thing incredible. And were the burglars inspired with a sarcastic sense of the humorous, that they performed the feat on April 1st last? The post-office in question was the York Road, just outside Waterloo Station. Three well-dressed men entered the place, which is in a tobacconist's shop, rushed the till, and decamped with $600 in gold.

Speaking of post-office thefts, a more outrageous robbery than that at the Knob Mill branch office, in Deansgate, Manchester, has seldom been known.

At a quarter to eight in the evening, the postmaster was busy counting his cash, when he heard a slight noise, and, glancing up, found himself looking down the barrel of a revolver. Without a word, the burglar grasped two piles of gold, twenty pounds in each—thrust them into his pockets, then two other piles of the same value, backed to the door, and was gone.

Three women clerks and two boy messengers were behind the counter, as well as the postmaster, and, not twenty yards from the door, in the brilliantly lighted street, a policeman was standing, all unconscious!

Very similar was the raid on the Royal Scotland Bank, at Motherwell, not long ago. Three men entered the place, apparently with the object of doing business, when suddenly one whipped out a pistol and pointed it at the head of the accountant.

But the robbers reckoned without their host—or, rather, their accountant. The latter instantly sprang at the man and seized the pistol. Next moment out rushed the manager and a customer from the bank parlor behind. The pistol went off in the struggle, but no one was hurt, and, after a fierce battle, all the men made good their escape. Later in the day they were run down and captured.

That was a cool customer who burgled so many houses in and around Nuneaton a year ago. He seemed to know by instinct when no one was about, and would walk in and calmly help himself to anything he fancied. All sorts of guards were set, but all to no purpose. At last, one day, a policeman saw another policeman leave a garden. He hurried toward him, hoping for news. No. 2 ran away. No. 1, much surprised, gave chase. He caught the fugitive, and found that this was the burglar, disguised in false whiskers and a policeman's uniform.

"SWEATING" GOLD COINS.

Gold coin "sweaters" of the most dangerous character have recently shown their handicraft in London and Birmingham through passing "sweated" sovereigns and half-sovereigns on unsuspicious tradesmen. Considerable gold is cut out of the coins and replaced with lead, which is plated to resemble the original metal.

The only way the money can be detected as having been tampered with is in its weight and by acid tests.

"Sweating" gold coins is one of the oldest and most pernicious forms of crookedness. In London and the larger cities organized gangs have been known to shake up bags of coin until the milling wore off enough gold to yield the manipulator a big margin. The gold dust was generally disposed of to dentists to be used as fillings for teeth.

The gang working in Birmingham is very bold. Instead of milling the coins, it is said they are cutting out chunks of the metal, thus making a big profit. Jewelers' tools are used by the crooks, and, judging from the appearance of the work done, they are adepts.

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